

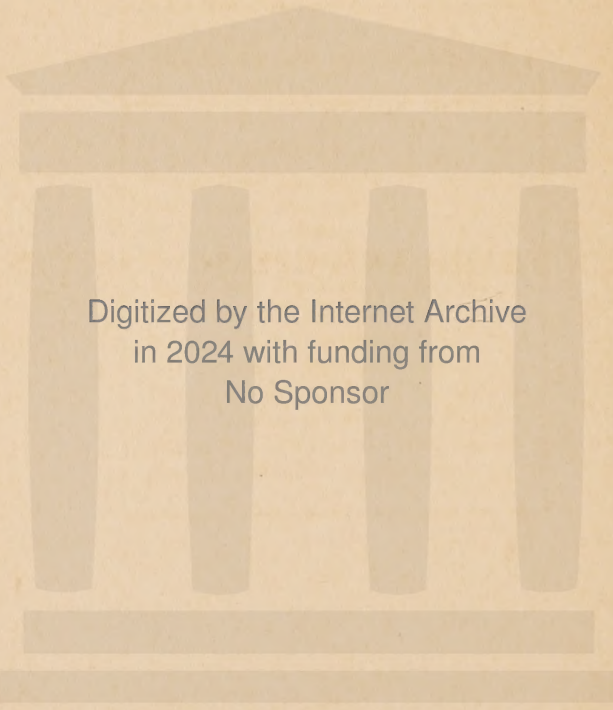
# Green Trails and Upland - Pastures -

Walter Prichard Eaton









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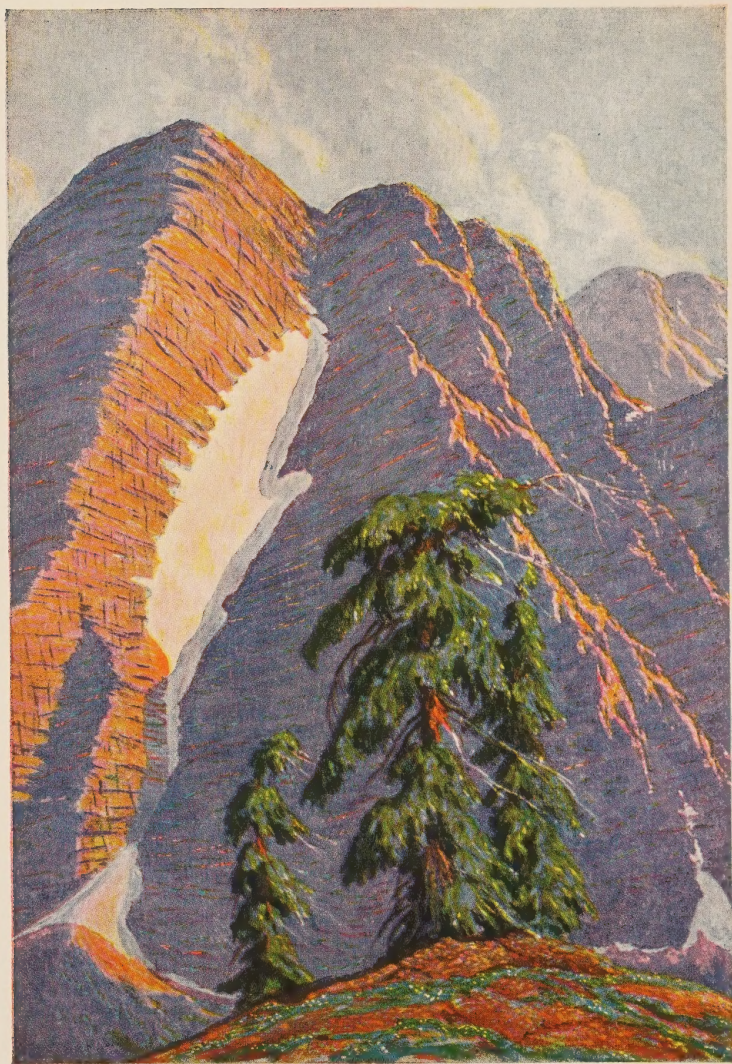
**GREEN TRAILS AND UPLAND PASTURES**

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BOY SCOUTS OF THE WILD CAT PATROL  
THE RUNAWAY PLACE (*With Elise Underhill*)  
THE MAN WHO FOUND CHRISTMAS







Mt. Jackson, from Lincoln Pass—Glacier Park



# GREEN TRAILS AND UPLAND PASTURES

BY  
WALTER PRICHARD EATON

AUTHOR OF "THE BIRD HOUSE MAN,"  
"THE IDYL OF TWIN FIRES," ETC.



*ILLUSTRATED IN COLOUR*

GARDEN CITY                      NEW YORK  
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To  
MY MOTHER

WHOSE HAND FIRST LED ME OUT  
AMONG THE FLOWERS  
AND WHOSE PLEA WAS THE FIRST I HEARD  
IN DEFENSE OF THE WILD  
FOLK OF THE WOODS





## NOTE

CERTAIN of the chapters of this book have previously appeared in various magazines, "Upland Pastures" in *Scribner's*; "Glacier Park," "Where Glaciers Feed the Apple Roots," "The Harvests of the Wild Places," "Neighbors of the Winter Night," "Weather and the Sky," and "Nature and the Psalmist" in *Harpers's*; "Trees" in the *Century*; "The Cohorts of the Frost," "Bridges," "Stone Walls," and "Christmas and the Winter World" in *McBride's*; and "The Skirmish Line of Spring," "Rocky Mountain Wild Flowers" and "Landscape Lines and Gardening" in the *New Country Life*. The Author gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to the editors of these publications.

W. P. E.

Stockbridge, Massachusetts

Autumn, 1917



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## GREEN TRAILS AND UPLAND PASTURES





# GREEN TRAILS AND UPLAND PASTURES

## CHAPTER I

### UPLAND PASTURES

THERE are alluring names in the corner of the world where I dwell, such as the Upper Meadow, Sky Farm, and High Pasture. Is there not something breeze-blown and spacious about the very words High Pasture? You do not need a picture to bring the image to your eye. Your image will not in the least resemble our High Pasture, to be sure, but what does that matter? You will see a greensward flung like a mantle over the tall shoulder of a hill, the blue dome of the sky dropping down behind it, and to the ear of memory will come the faint, lazy tinkle of a cow-bell. It is the magic of the words which matters, not the realism of the image.

Our High Pasture is on the southern shoulder of Rattlesnake Hill, and it is splendidly isolated from the lowlands by forest. The forest marches down from the summit upon it and stops abruptly with an edge like a

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tall green wall. The pasture itself goes over the shoulder on either side with a beautiful dome-like billow, and meets the forest again climbing up from the valley. You see no road leading thither. It is a lonely clearing on the heights, and behind the sharp, doming line of its wave-crest the sky drops down to infinite depths of space. How far one could see if he climbed there and looked over the crest! How fresh the wind must blow out of those deep sky spaces, though here in the valley the summer day is breathless and sultry! How tiny the black-and-white specks of the Holsteins appear, as they seem barely to move, like lazy flies on a green tapestry!

One Autumn not long ago the farmer ploughed High Pasture, turning it from green to brown, and when the first snow-spits of November came the furrows filled, and suddenly it was a beautiful zebra-skin laid over the shoulder of the hill. Then all Winter it was a dome of glistening white amid the reddish-gray of the mountain forest. But as Spring came up the land it grew emerald with oats, and in lush midsummer we climbed through the woods to reach it, up the bed of a forest brook, and came out upon the lower edge as upon a beach. The waves were breaking at our feet. Over the dome-line above us, out of those deep sky spaces behind, came the wind, and swept the billows down upon us with a rustling murmur as of some magic, brittle sea.

We skirted the pasture to the highest point, while a

woodchuck rushed off into the oats, stirring their tops like a fish swimming just under the surface of the water; swallows skimmed the field like gulls, and even the pines to our left spoke with the voice of the ocean. At the crest of the ridge we set our backs to the forest wall and looked out over the pasture below us. Ever the wind went by across the oats, wave after wave of emerald, and we saw, on the plain beneath, our tidy village and the winding thread of the river, and beyond that another hill going up with the green pastures of Sky Farm perched on its fifteen-hundred-foot shoulder; and farther still the mountain walls like smoky blue billows on the horizon. Behind us, in the dim, cool evergreens, a wood thrush sang. A chewink hopped in a near-by tree, and a field sparrow was busy in the oats. How fresh was the breeze, how peaceful this airy spaciousness! The world was being bathed in sunshine and dried by the wind. We lay down at the pasture edge, and the waving oats shut out everything but the sky. We could look a long way into the green aisles between the stalks, and once we saw a field mouse pass across the end of a vista, a prowler in this pygmy forest. He made no sound. There was no sound anywhere save the brittle wave-swish of the grain, the deep murmur of the evergreens behind us, and the music of the birds.

To me there is less allurements in Sky Farm, because it is inhabited. The true upland pasture is isolated, alone. But yet Sky Farm has many attractions not

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often appreciated by the vacation visitors to our valley, who almost invariably exclaim: "It must be dreadfully cold there in Winter!" The road to this farm winds up the mountain for two miles through a wood of tall chestnut trees, noble old fellows hung with bitter-sweet and shading wild garden borders of fern and brake. It is a road the motors never essay, and last year's leaves lie in the wheel ruts in the Spring, while in the Autumn the squirrels scold at your intrusion. Presently you hear a brook falling down a ravine to the left, and the road grows steeper, the thank-you-marms more frequent. Light breaks ahead, and you stand suddenly in the Sky Farm plum orchard. If it is blossom time, you stand suddenly in Japan, after two miles of climbing through a New England forest. But beyond the plum orchard is the unmistakable gray barn and the unmistakable small, bare house of the New England hill farm. A few steps bring you to the dooryard. The road ends at the barn runway—the road ends and the view opens. You look back over the forest, mile on mile to the horizon hills, and, through the barn itself and the smaller rear door, at the vacant sky, for on that side the hill drops sheer away. Behind the house the clearing extends a quarter of a mile up a steep slope to meet the woods coming down from the summit of the mountain. Here browse the cattle which give the farm excuse for being. Their steep pasturage is sown with granite boulders, amid which they move, or lie quietly

on gray days when sky and rocks are of a colour. Sometimes they wander still higher into the summit woods, and as you make your way up toward the peak of the mountain you will hear their bells tinkling unseen. From the doorstep of his house the farmer can look down upon our village. On still Sabbath mornings he can hear the call from the church steeples, and at night, perhaps, the boom of the hours. Yet he dwells strangely in a world apart, like one on a watch-tower. His son, to be sure, in fine weather can reach school on a bicycle (at no little personal risk) in an incredibly short time. But it is slow work getting home again. Once home for the evening, it must be a strong temptation indeed to draw the inhabitants of this house down to those twinkling lights of the town. They look out upon our habitations, but they hear only the rushing of the night wind over the mountain or the muffled tinkle of a cow-bell as the herd moves to a new pasturage under the stars. To such a farm might Teufelsdröckh have retired.

I have never been able to decide in what season of the year the Upper Meadow is at its best, for in each it has a shy, elusive charm peculiarly its own. The Lower Meadow, through which it is reached, is a link between one of the largest farms and the extensive swamp which lies at the steep side of a mountain. This meadow, or hayfield, is many acres in extent, threaded by a slow-moving, alder-fringed brook. On the farther side,



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through a barred gate, a wood-road strikes upward. It ascends rapidly for perhaps a quarter of a mile, and comes out into an unexpected clearing, a genuine little meadow two or three acres in extent, pocketed on a shelf of the precipitous mountain wall, which was not visible from the valley. Doubtless you have seen a tiny lake with a wooded mountainside leaping up from it. The Upper Meadow is exactly like such a lake, with lush green grass for water, grass so rich, indeed, that you almost look for it to hold reflections. No prospect is possible from the Upper Meadow save the view of the mountain wall springing beside it. It is shut into the woods. Yet the steep climb thither, the silence, the washed air, all conspire to the sense of height. It is a man-made clearing, but only in haying time does man intrude. It has all the artlessness of a forest glade. In Spring the charm of the Upper Meadow is virginal, not because of the trilliums and dog-tooth violets along its borders, but because of the birches bursting into leaf. It is surrounded by woods in which birches predominate, and there are many birches all up the mountain wall. In the early season, while yet the other hardwoods are naked, the winter-washed trunks of the birches stand out with startling distinctness, one great forked patriarch in particular looking like a lightning stab against the background of a pine. Then, as the warmth steals into the soil, the birches begin to put on their brilliant foliage, almost a Nile green, per-



A greensward flung like a mantle over the tall  
shoulder of a hill



haps the most lively in our northern latitudes. As the sun strikes in upon them, and upon the moist, rich young grass of the meadow, they make a vivid screen about this lonely glade, a screen of sharp white and translucent foliage, and all up the mountain, amid the bare, lilac trunks of the second-growth timber, you can see the birch green shimmering in the golden light. The birches are never so virginal as in their bright, diaphanous robes of Spring, and no scene for me has quite the delicate beauty of the Upper Meadow at that hour.

But when the forest foliage has melted into the lush monotony of midsummer, the meadow grass is high and ripe, the thrushes have almost ceased their woodland songs, and the laurel bushes on the borders of the clearing have dropped their clustered petals of pink and white, a sound comes to you as you climb through the woods which contrasts oddly with the sylvan stillness—the hot click-click-click of a mower. As you emerge into the Upper Meadow you see half the grass lying low, and against the upstanding edge, eating it down, advances the machine, behind the strong, willing breasts of the brown horses glistening with sweat. Man has made his annual invasion. Under the shade of a bush stands a brown jug of barley water. Out in the sun stands the rake, awaiting its turn. In a day or two the great wagon will come and carry down the hay, leaving the meadow once more to the birds and moun-

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tain silence for another twelvemonth. But meanwhile the willing horses in their strength, the measured, mathematical fall of the grass, the cicada click of the mower, the occasional shout of the driver, are sights and sounds not unpleasant, and you lie beneath the shadows which creep out across the stubble, to look and listen all the drowsy afternoon.

To emerge from the woods in Autumn into the Upper Meadow is like putting your head and shoulders through a great, gorgeous tapestry, from the dark underside. The bordering trees, above the glossy green of the laurel bushes, are in bright array, and above you all the mountainside is triumphant with colour. Even the meadow floor has reclothed itself in green after the reaping, as if to be dressed for this pageantry.

But in Winter, perhaps, our meadow can be at its best, when the world wears white and not a creature that wanders unseen in the woods but leaves its track. In Winter our Berkshire world becomes everywhere more simplified. The myriad motors desert our highways, and the horse comes into his own once more, with a jingle of sleighbells. The deserted summer estates, their rose bushes clad in straw, their garden beds buried under pine boughs, no longer impose upon us an alien and more sophisticated order. We may cut cross-lots on our snowshoes without fear of trespass. And then it is that the Upper Meadow becomes the hermit of the pastures. No human tracks have preceded ours up



the trail. We come out into the mountain clearing, dazzling under the sun, amid the hush of the winter woods. The mountain wall goes up beyond us, bearing its dark, snow-flecked pines prominently against the gray and white of bare birch and chestnut trunks, etched with a myriad vertical strokes upon the groundwork of snow. There is only the soft, padded swish of our snowshoes to be heard as we advance to the centre of the meadow. Yet life has been here. A deer has crossed—two deer, three deer—plunging almost knee deep in the snow. Over the white carpet a pheasant has walked, one foot mathematically behind the other, and at this point something startled him, for the tracks cease abruptly. Here are the marks on the snow where his long tail feathers brushed as he took the air. Nearer the edge of the meadow, where the glossy laurel fringe is still green, a rabbit emerged, hopped out a way, and turned back. And it will be strange if we do not find the track of a fox, sneaking down in the night from his hole up in the mountain rocks to the valley farms. There is not even the sign of mown grass to speak of man in the clearing now. It is lonely as a frozen mountain lake, wrapped secure in the heart of its upland wilderness.

In these softer modern days, when we all desire the valley warmth, the nervous companionship of our kind, the handy motion-picture theatre, many an upland pasture is going back to wildness, invaded by birch and

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pine upon the borders, overrun with the hosts of the shrubby cinquefoil, most provocative of plants because it refuses to blossom unanimously, putting forth its yellow flowers a few at a time here and there on the sturdy bush. Such a pasture I know upon a hilltop eighteen hundred feet above the sea, where now few cattle browse, and seldom enough save at blueberry season does a human foot pass through the rotted bars or straddle the tumbling, lichen-covered stone wall, where sentinel mulleins guard the gaps. It is not easy now even to reach this pasture, for the old logging roads are choked and the cattle tracks, eroded deep into the soil like dry irrigation ditches, sometimes plunge through tangles of hemlock, crossing and criss-crossing to reach little green lawns where long ago the huts of charcoal-burners stood, and only at the very summit converging into parallels that are plain to follow. Some of them, too, will lead you far astray, to a rocky shoulder of the hill guarded by cedars, where you will suddenly view the true pasture a mile away, over a ravine of forest. Yet once you have reached the true summit pasture, there bursts upon you a prospect the Lake country of England cannot excel; here the northbound Peabodies rest in May to tune their voices for their mating song, here the everlasting flower sheds its subtle perfume on the upland air, the sweet fern contends in fragrance, and here the world is all below you with naught above but Omar's inverted bowl and a drifting cloud.

It is good now and then to hobnob with the clouds, to be intimate with the sky. "The world is too much with us" down below; every house and tree is taller than we are, and discourages the upward glance. But here in the hilltop pasture nothing is higher than the vision save the blue zenith and the white flotilla of the clouds. Climbing over the tumbled wall, to be sure, the grass-line is above your eye; and over it, but not resting upon it, is a great Denali of a cumulus. It is not resting upon the pasture ridge, because the imagination senses with the acuteness of a stereoscope the great drop of space between, and feels the thrill of aërial perspective. Your feet hasten to the summit, and, once upon it, your hat comes off, while the mountain wind lifts through your hair and you feel yourself at the apex and zenith of the universe. Far below lie the blue eyes of Twin Lakes, and beyond them rises the beautiful dome of the Taconics, ethereal blue in colour, yet solid and eternal. Lift your face ever so little, and the green world begins to fall from sight, the great cloud-ships, sailing in the summer sky, begin to be the one thing prominent. How softly they billow as they ride! How exquisite they are with curve and shadow and puffs of silver light! Even as you watch, one sweeps across the sun, and trails a shadow anchor over the pasture, over your feet. You almost hold your breath as it passes, for it seems in some subtle way as if the cloud had touched you, had spoken you on its passage.

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From this upland pasture you may watch "the golden light of afternoon" withdraw from the valleys, like the receding waters of a flood, and the amethyst shadows creep up the eastern hills. You may watch the cloud-ships come to anchor over the Catskills in the west, and transform themselves into Himalayas, snow-capped, rose-crowned. And, as you descend at last through the cow paths and logging roads to the valley, it will be breathless twilight in the hemlocks, and a wood thrush will sing of the evening mysteries.

But the upland pasture that I love best of all is in Franconia, high above the little Ham Branch intervale, on the forest-clad slopes of Kinsman. A single road runs up the intervale, into a region of abandoned clearings. The great west wall of Kinsman, rearing to its saddle-back twin summits more than four thousand feet aloft, is uncompromising and discourages human conceit. There is a rugged wildness here our Berkshire land knows nothing of, and a tax on the breath in climbing for which we have no adequate preparation. No railroad whistle can here reach the ears. Creatures wilder than deer may cross this clearing. And the air of it is filled with the pungent fragrance of the northern balsams.

The way to this pasture lies through a lower pasture behind the tiny farmhouse by the road. It is a steep way, past a running brook and through a sugar grove where the sugar house of rough boards stands sur-



rounded by huge woodpiles against next year's "b'ilin' down." At the head of the grove, after an acre or two more of clearing, the path suddenly starts upward at a sharp angle, and for a quarter of a mile goes through a dense forest of young spruces and balsams so dense that scarce a leaf of undergrowth is visible on the brown needles. It emerges from the evergreens as suddenly as it entered them, and you find yourself on a plateau pasture five or six acres in extent, once regular in shape but now broken into tiny bays and inlets all along the edges by the invasion of the forest, by jetties and capes of Christmas trees. And out beyond each cape and peninsula are reefs and islands of young balsams, anywhere from six inches to twenty feet high, rich in colour, perfect in shape, incomparable in fragrance. The pasture, in a few years, would be quite overrun, obliterated, were it not for the cattle. They cannot quite fight back the invasion, but they can hold it in check. None of them is visible, perhaps, as you enter this mountain glade, but you hear the sweet tinkle of a bell, and presently, around a cape of Christmas trees, comes a Jersey, head down, bell jingling, to lift her soft eyes and look at you.

The pasture is almost level, but at the farther side the steep ascent is renewed again, the path marked by a giant oak. Here the hardwood begins, witness of some bygone lumbering. Behind the oak looms the great north peak of Kinsman, which can now be climbed,



thanks to a trail recently cut by the son of Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, whose collected poems, published in 1860, have been quite unjustly forgotten. The Tuckerman trail is a steep and rough one, part way through absolutely virgin timber, where the trunks of the great canoe birches are green with age and moss, and it leads to the finest view in the White Mountains, finer than that from Washington or Lafayette. But we shall not leave our pasture now for the peak. The peak is for special occasions, the pasture for our daily solace.

All day long in this pasture the Peabodies, or white-throated sparrows, sing their flutelike call; out in the sunlight or in the cool woods above the cow-bells tinkle drowsily. All day long the great north peak looks down upon you from the east, and you look down, in turn, upon the world to the west—or so much of it as you can glimpse through the vista of the steep trail in the evergreens. Looking westward, if you raise your eyes, you see the pointed firs cutting sharp against the sky, the sentinels of the pasture. It is at the sunset hour in June that we love the pasture best, for it was at such an hour that we discovered it many years ago, we two together. The sun may have dropped behind Flagstaff Hill when we leave the valley, and the cows have descended to stand lowing behind the barn, but our ascent is as rapid as the sun's declension, and we reach the upland in time to find the west taking fire, flaming into gold.



The clearing extends up a steep slope to meet the woods



Now there comes a hush in the bird songs, a hush in all nature, while the peak behind us grows amethyst, the high zenith clouds are salmon streamers, and the golden west blushes into rose. The woods grow dim. The rose dusks to a deeper hue, and suddenly against it all the pointed firs stand darkly up like a spired city in fairyland. At that moment the birds break their hush, the Peabodies flute from spire to spire like little Moslems in Christian belfries, and from the dusk of the forest wall behind us comes ringing the full-throated song of a hermit thrush. Even the sparrows respect that master minstrel, and pause. An expectant silence succeeds. Then, from farther off, from the very depths of the woods, the coolness of their brooks, the greenness of their leaves, the mystery of their silences made vocal, the answer comes, in liquid triplets dripping twilight. George Moore has called the songs of Schubert and Schumann "the moonlit lakes and nightingales of music." But what man-made music is twilight and the hermit thrush? A few of Mozart's andantes? Almost, perhaps, yet they lack the forest timbre and the dusk; they are liquid and pensive, but they were composed at sunrise, or while the sun yet lingered on the lowland meadows. Incomparable of birds, uncelebrated in classic story like the nightingale, uttering no homesick note in a warm and sentimental southland like the mocking bird, your habitat in your musical mating-time is the forests of our bleak New Hampshire hills,

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and on the border of an upland pasture at twilight you sing an unheard song that could ravish the world!

And we, listening breathless beneath the dimming spires of the pointed firs, amid the warm fragrance of the balsams, are secretly glad that this is so!

It is from an upland pasture that you may view the cloud-drive best. The Franconia cloud-drives come from the southeast, and usually the vanguard of the procession sucks in through the funnel of the Notch, on the other side of Kinsman, wrapping the Old Man of the Mountain in vapour while yet the sun is shining for us. But soon the vapours find their way upward. We lift our eyes and see their artillery smoke coming over the north peak, trailing, wind-blown and shredded, from its trees, and then rushing out over our valley to obliterate the sun. Once over the rampart, the whole storm follows in their wake. A great, dark mass of vapour drops down with clammy affection about the mountain, rushes through the tree-tops, and seems about to descend to our very house, when it is suddenly whisked off. Above this, on a level with the summit, the main storm clouds rush, pouring rain, and, finally, through rift after closing rift in this layer, we can see far aloft, moving more leisurely, great masses of cumuli.

The point where the lowest cloud leaves the mountain is the top of an upland pasture. In spite of the drenching rain, we climb past the huddled, despondent cattle



into the very vapours. The last heave of the pasture into the woods is shrouded one moment in gray mist, and cleared the next by a freak of the wind, revealing the tall trees beyond and a glimpse into the high defile of Cannon Mountain. The cloud whips cold and numbing about us. Looking back down the pasture we can see the rain-drenched farms, and the western hill wall going up again into cloud. Just over us the dark wrack moves with incredible speed, propelled by a wind we cannot feel. We are on the very under edge of the cloud-drive, in curious kinship with the storm.

But no words on upland pastures would be complete without mention of the stars. The charm of upland pastures is their isolation, their fellowship with cloud and wind, their silence and their spaciousness, lifted far above the valley, adventurous of the heights; and the boon companions of isolation are the stars.

The sunset glow has long faded in the west, the elfin spires are but black shadows on purple depth, the Peabodies and thrushes have ceased their song, and only an owl or a night-hawk sneaks on silent wing from the woods behind—yet still we remain amid the warm fragrance of the balsams, loath to leave, or perhaps wrapped in our blankets not intending to leave till we have boiled our morning coffee against a boulder, while the sun flatters “the mountain tops with sovereign eye.” No valley lamps are visible from this high, sheltered chamber. But a planet hangs like a beacon

in a fir-tree top, and all the zenith blazes. How patient they are, the stars! How slow-moving, how unalterable! You are very small, beneath this coverlet of the Milky Way, and to your mind come back the words from Tuckerman's sonnet—he whose son built the path to the peak beyond:

And what canst thou, to whom no hands belong,  
To hasten by one hour the morning's birth?  
Or stay one planet at his circle hung,  
In the great flight of stars across the earth?

It is good to feel such humbleness amid the solemnity of the heights. But it is good, as well, to feel still the fragrant warmth of the balsams keeping off the wind, to listen quietly while a little bird close by wakes with a sweet cheep and rustles to another perch, and to hear, for good-night lullaby, the distant, drowsy tinkle of a cow-bell, as the herd, turned loose again after milking, make their way slowly back to their upland pasture.

## CHAPTER II

### THE COHORTS OF THE FROST

SNOW! What a host of pleasant associations the word awakes! Words are but Pandoras, beneficent or otherwise, each lifting the lid from its box of memories and suggestions and loosing them into the fancy. For those of us, at least, who dwell in a land neither of perpetual frost nor perpetual Summer, who expect the delights of a white Christmas and the vernal resurrection of April, the word "snow" is key to one of the choicest of caskets, wherein abide alike the homeliest and heartiest of childhood memories, and the stored impressions of Nature's subtlest of colour values or the cold, quiet recollections of moonlight brooding on a winter world.

The lid of the crystal casket has been lifted for me by the action of my pen in writing the word. The memory of a room flies out to me, and nestles warmly in my fancy. I am in the room, yet, strangely enough, I seem also for a moment outside looking at the house, with its long hip roof behind, its single huge chimney, its open-sided woodshed filled with log ends to the top, its guardian trees. Then the sense of the room steals over

me, a room with low ceiling and a red cloth on the table. In the corner stands a tall clock, and above the dial face a brig, with all sails set, rocks to the swing of the pendulum, upon a painted ocean. *Tick-tock, tick-tock*—very slowly and resonantly the great clock measures the flight of time, and the monotony of it is as a lullaby. The sun pours sleepily in through the western windows, over the pots of red geraniums. On the hearth a fire crackles and the cat is asleep on the rag rug before it. Outside, the world is dazzling white at first, but presently it is blue, the same blue as the sky, for the sun is sinking and the tall columnar screen of the sugar grove on the hill is chill with shadow. There is steam rising from the muffler of the man driving past in a pung. How cold is the outside world, how still, how buried! *Tick-tock, tick-tock*—the brig rides up and down upon its painted ocean. A log falls with a crackle of sparks and then the flames wallow anew up the great chimney. My eyes close drowsily even now at the memory, to open again to the sound of dishes rattled in the kitchen and the coming of the evening lamps.

The scene changes, and I stand outside of myself, as it were, and see myself go by down the wind, the spray of blown powder enveloping me to the waist and whitening my shoulder blades. I am a dark little figure in blue "pull-down" cap and navy blue pea-jacket, with a japanned tin lunch box under my arm, a figure as dark as the black cedars beside the road-

side fence, or so much of the fence as is visible above the drifts—often only the top rail. There is no sun, only a patch of misty radiance in a white sky. The blown snow is scurrying in clouds over the pastures, half obscuring the rusty wall of woods beyond. Up the road ahead of me it swirls, and it comes pushing behind, hastening my footsteps and stinging my face when I turn about. Now I am that little boy again and feel the tingling joy of ploughing along before the wind, of kicking through the drifts, of racing ahead to catch the runner of a pung, perhaps, or of fighting my way home again with my face wrapped to the eyes in my woollen muffler—that supreme joy of contending with elemental Nature when she demands of you your utmost.

Since that little boy blew down the road before the wind, between the dark cedars, in a snowstorm which rose from the ground, he has watched many a snow descend upon a great city, there to blacken and melt and finally to be carted ignominiously off and dumped in the river. It would begin to fall, perhaps, in the evening, misting the lamps that blaze along Broadway and swirling in under sidewalk canopies to powder the hair of the jewelled women who were alighting from their carriages and scurrying across the walk to the theatre entrance. In the morning the sun would rise over a city transformed. The stark trees in the park would throw out black limbs outlined beneath a white capping; in Madison Square, Esquimaux igloos would rise in the



streets; for one glorious morning the drab pattern of the town would disappear beneath the soft, clean blanket. But then would come the slush, the blackening, the spatter. The country boy grew homesick for the sound of sleighbells, for the rush of sleds, for the great sweep of the storm over mountain walls and the long weeks of blue shadows on the silent fields, for all the unexpurgated drama of the snowy season. It was not the summer heat that drove him from New York, for that he always had contrived to escape. It was much more the snowless Winter, Winter without the dramatic entrance of the storm, Winter without the happy ending of silver brooks alive in every road and finally of vanishing wisps of white drift behind pasture walls, melting like clouds before the winds of Spring.

When you were a little boy did they tell you that when it snowed the old woman up in the sky was shaking out her feather bed? It was an appealing fancy, and I sometimes wonder what is its modern substitute now that feather beds have passed. It was a great joy, surely, when the first storm began, to stand with upturned face and watch the great flakes come down out of a white sky, assuming a separate individuality quite suddenly, about ten or fifteen feet above your head. Your eyes would unconsciously pick out a particularly large flake as it separated itself from the blur of the descending thousands, and you would watch it flutter easily to earth, sometimes with

the lightness and irresponsibility of a feather, sometimes as if it were sliding down the air. Often you would run to catch it on your coat sleeve, to admire its fairy texture of interwoven crystals. Sometimes it would swerve and hit you in the face, or fall into your open, laughing mouth where it instantly dissolved with the faintest hint of a cool waterdrop. Then faster and faster the flakes began to come; they were getting smaller now as the storm settled down to its work, and the eyes were blinded trying to individualize them. The paths were already white, the brown grass powdered, the evergreens putting on their hoods. It was then that you ceased your sport and looked out on the landscape in silence, no doubt unconscious of why it suddenly held you, but yielding to its spell.

There is not Emerson's "tumultuous privacy of storm" in the first snowfall, nor the suggestion of Whittier's rustic "Snowbound." It comes upon a land not yet devoid of colour on the hills, the browns and yellows and faint reds of hardwood foliage still shredding the branches, and a great deal of it must fall before the ground plan of the earth—the roads and pasture squares and meadow swales—is obliterated. What the first snow does is suddenly to spread a magic gauze between you and the familiar world, which accomplishes what the white gauze in the playhouse is intended to accomplish—the removal of the objects behind it into a dream place of dimmed outlines and

shadowy values. Through this medium the high lights, paradoxically, are the darkest spots, a foreground evergreen, perhaps, or the barn across the road. A pasture elm is a fountain of twig tracery, the wall of the mountain a wave of shadow billowing against the white sky. But there is nothing theatrical about the soft gauze of the storm; there is no concentration or colour in the illumination, but a uniform radiation of pure light, as pure as water.

And now, when you have looked your fill on the soft suffusion of your landscape spaces, you are at length aware of the sound of the storm, a sound as soft as the sight, not a patter nor a hiss, but something between the two as the flakes descend on the dead grass and the foliage, seeming to accelerate in pace when they near the earth, as if eager for their lodging place. This delicate sound, of course, is more apparent in the woods, or in fields where the dried weeds stand up stiffly, and I have walked many a mile in Winter listening to it in the dead foliage above my head, while each new vista showed a white world and under foot the snow was deepening.

Is the world ever more lovely than on the first morning after the first storm? From the Oh's! and Ah's! and How Lovely's! of the average inexpressive mortal, to the poetry of Whittier or the canvases of innumerable artists, the record runs of our delight in the "frolic architecture" of the snow. I sometimes wonder, as they spindle skyward, why Norway spruces were

planted before my dwelling, till the first storm has come and the next morning's sun has risen bright and cold. Then I know. Then their long lateral branches, upcurved at the ends, bear great loads of white, in cones and caps and pyramids, and the green pendants of foliage below are like the beards of strange old men, those unseen gnomes, perhaps, who so perplexed Peer Gynt—and the critics! Then a great white birch among them is oddly whiter still—the only thing which can look white against new snow, except the feet of Nicolette. Then the spire of a hemlock beyond is like a frosted Christmas card, and farther still, beyond the white obscurity of the hedge, the world simply vanishes into snow and sky, the background of a Japanese print, which is to say, pure suggestion, the blank paper. How curiously shut-in we feel on such a morning, in our little red house among the evergreens! We feel as shut-in, as deliciously private, as when the mid-winter storm is besieging us, and the fire roars, and we gaze through the windows into a white darkness. But, though we are thus shut in, we can hear from our porch the shouts of our neighbour's children, the shrill screams of little girls going by to school, pursued by wicked little boys with snowballs, and—yes! there they are!—we can hear the jingle of sleighbells. No work can be done this morning! Down from the attic come the snowshoes, the thongs are tested, moccasins are oiled, and we are off for the deep woods.



The deep woods have many moods in Winter, more, perhaps, than in Summer, or even in Spring. But they are never quite so beautiful as on this brilliant morning after the first heavy snowfall. Now the underbrush is bowed everywhere in slender hoops and arches of white. Now the brooks are still unfrozen and have hollowed the snow on their banks into rounded caps. Now the tree trunks down the forest aisles are sharply divided like a Harlequin's costume into black and white, white on the windward side, black on the leeward. Now the forest overhead is one continuous roof of frosted fairy tracery, dazzling where the sun shoots through, soft and feathery in shadow. Down a glittering forest aisle a fern stands up in the shelter of a rock, a vivid green above the white carpet. About us in the silence, as we walk, come down little plops of snow from shaken branches. As the sun mounts and its heat is felt, the tiny avalanches are sounding softly all around us in the woods. By noon the fairy groins and arches overhead, all this tracery as of elfin Gothic gone delightfully mad, will have fallen. The trees will stand up naked above a snow carpet packing down for the first layer of Winter. But for one glorious morning we walk in spangled aisles and count it the best day of the year.

Later, when the real storms of Winter have followed and packed two feet of snow upon the forest floor, when the brooks have frozen into winding coils of slippery



black amid the great trunks, when the trees are stern and naked with daggers of light between them, a hush of death comes over the winter woods, a beautiful, solemn hush, and one instinctively lowers his voice as in the presence of mystery. Yet see where the deer-mice have danced, and where a squirrel has jumped to the foot of an evergreen, burrowed for cones, and emerged again to leave the telltale husks of his meal. Looking at the records on the ground, the woods seem very much alive, alive at hours when we are sleeping, perhaps, and the deer come through. See, here are their tracks, and here a shrub eaten off clean to the snow line.

As the snow settles on the face of Nature and becomes a part of it, as the village paths are packed as hard as pavement and the roads glisten with runner tracks, we begin to lose consciousness of the first all-pervading whiteness and become aware of the colours in the winter world. I once kept a diary of the snow for an entire season—need I say it was my first season after our exodus from the land of bondage? Looking back over its pages, I find descriptions of rhapsodic, not to say startling, colour schemes. Here is one:

“The view from High Pasture this afternoon was lovely. In the southwest, under a canopy of leaden clouds, was a warm red rift over the peak of Tom Ball Mountain, and it tinted the snow in the valley almost to my feet. To the east the sky was clear, a pure mother-of-pearl green and opal, over the long wave line of brilliant ultramarine mountains.”

But that note is not exaggerated. It is an accurate transcription. Many years ago I read somewhere a statement by Maxfield Parrish that the colour scheme of New England could be as vivid as that of Arizona, but it was not till I had dwelt a Winter through amid the New England hills that I believed him. Mount Lafayette sometimes is a mighty amethyst in the August sunset, but even our humble Berkshires are amethysts evening after evening when the valleys are deep in snow and the wooded slopes are gray with chestnuts and birches streaked on the winter carpet; they are a beautiful chain of amethysts binding the farms, the villages, the river reaches, and at their feet at twilight into the rusty tamarack swamp steals a purple veil, which mounts the eastern wall as the sun sinks behind the western, dusk-ing into blue before it creeps quite to the summit, and changing from blue to an elusive, shadowy gunmetal colour as the evening comes and a silver moon rides high.

There are sometimes colours in the later snowstorms, too. It may be, of course, merely a coincidence, but within my observation these coloured snowstorms have all occurred after the February thaws, when the mind has begun to prepare itself for Spring. The increased power of the sun and the higher temperature are, in fact, responsible for the atmospheric effects which produce the colour. It can come from nothing else, for the earth is as bare and brown as in December; there is no more colour on the hills, no brighter hue on

the evergreens. Such a storm is the winter analogy of the summer shower which dusks the landscape with a dun, ashen cloud, but leaves a hole of blue sky in the west and plays on far mountains here and there a turquoise searchlight. From one quarter of the heavens the white vapour drives down upon us out of colourless space, but in the opposite quarter a mother-of-pearl sky gleams faintly through the mist, the mountain wall beneath it is like blue and green watered silk seen through a white veil, and the fir trees are emerald. Such a storm passes quickly. We know it is not "fixin' for a blizzard," as the saying goes. But while it lasts it has something of the iridescent yet illusive colour of a tone-poem by Debussy.

How lovely, in its soft, delicate shades, is the winter landscape by the river bank, where the gray and coffee-tan of a mottled old sycamore leans out over the dark ice or the black streaks of open water, while beneath its bare limbs, over the snowy fields, we see the blue dome of a mountain! The snow builds exquisite cornices over the river bank, and the dead weed stalks rise above them with a delicate, stiff grace. Every line—the snow cornices, the edge of open water, the bare limbs of the tree, the mountain dome—is a fluid curve, and every colour is a tint, suffusing the black and white ground plan. There is a subtler technique in the winter landscape.

In the country, the old age of the snow is dignified

and its passing a beautiful thing. All Winter it has covered the ground, protecting the shrubs and flower beds, conserving our gardens, our woods, even our soil. Then, on a March morning, it begins to feel the deadly breath of the south wind and knows that its time has come. I have unconsciously personified it, falling into Mr. Ruskin's "pathetic fallacy" and violating the no doubt excellent principles once taught me by the worthy "Rhetoric" of Professor Hill. But occasionally one's instincts kick over the traces of rule and reason, and the kindly snow, which has covered our world the season through, will demand its place in our pagan pantheon, our secret temple of the ancient deities none of us has quite destroyed in his heart. Yes, the snow feels the mortal kiss of the south wind and knows that its time has come. By noon the roads are water brooks, two silvery streams dancing and flashing down the runner ruts. On exposed sections, where the wind has blown the snow thin, bare ground begins to appear and the sleigh runners crunch and grind behind the straining horse. On a southern slope of autumn ploughing, the brown tops of furrows begin here and there to poke up above the white, like tiny islands in the sea. The eaves drip. The chickadees are sounding their love call. Then it is we go out into the buried garden and see the dark cone of the manure pile melted off and rising above the white, a happy harbinger of flowers.

A second day, a third day, of caressing south wind,





A mottled old sycamore leans out over the dark ice





and the sleighbells jingle no more, the mountain pastures are bare, the fields and gardens are wet, brown earth, and suddenly a song sparrow sings in the hedge. But we make one more trip into the deep woods, to say farewell to the Winter, into the high forests on the mountains this time, for it is there the snow longest abides. We tramp at first along sloppy, muddy roads, and then through soggy fields, past brooks which are full to overflowing. There are white drifts along the pasture walls, however, and as we draw near the mountain side we can see the white carpet through the trees, which explains why the mountains still look gray though the rest of the world is brown. As we enter the woods, our boots sink almost knee-high into the soft mass, which is too heavy for snowshoes. As we climb, it grows deeper, eighteen inches of it some years in late March on the northern side of the hills. The mountain wall grows steeper, the climbing harder, till at last the soft, treacherous snow affords no footing at all, and we can climb no more. We find an exposed rock which the sun has melted clear, and sit there to rest, surrounded by green arbutus plants and the fresh tendrils of Herb Robert. We are hot and coatless, yet soaked with snow. The melting is gradual up here in the woods, and so long as the woods remain they are our protection from spring floods, and our guarantee of a summer water supply.

The homeward trip is a matter of sliding, perhaps of frequent tumbles, of panting breath and laughter. The

roads have dried out perceptibly since we came over them earlier in the day. In many a furrow pools of water have succeeded the zebra stripes of white. As we look back to the upland pastures the shreds of drift along the stone walls and by the edge of the woods are frailer now. A day of warm rain, and they will be gone. How tawny red the willows are in the swamp! See, here are bursting pussy buds! We have said good-bye to the snow.

Yet not quite good-bye. In April it comes again, a last belated rear guard of white cavalry skirmishing across the garden after a dash over the northern mountain. The early peas are up, two double rows of them fifty feet long, and as the garden quickly whitens they make four green lines across the snow. Then the sun struggles through and drives back the attack. The hotbeds, covered as with a mat of feathers, begin to melt through; the manure pile steams; the eaves drip merrily; the astonished song sparrows, driven into the pines and even into the woodshed, emerge again and redouble their song as if to capture the lost time. This, indeed, is our farewell to the snow, and as we contemplate the green shoots of the perennials, protected, kept alive by their long winter covering; as we see our lilacs bursting into bud and hear the brook's full-throated babble, fed from the melting hills, there is tenderness and gratitude in our farewell, as there will be once more warmth in our welcome when over the northern hills comes back again the first white skirmish line of the cohorts of the frost.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SKIRMISH LINE OF SPRING

"I HAVE never been in the country in Spring before," said a visitor to our town, contemplating my pink apple trees against their backing of pine, and sniffing ecstatically.

"But, Madame," said I, "you have not been in the country in Spring this time."

It would have been a shame to rob her of her joy, had there been a chance that she would believe me. Of course, she did not. Yet actually the best part of Spring is over before the apple blossoms come. My summer neighbours who open their places in May to enjoy this season, and who suppose the "hardships" of a mountain Winter to be almost unendurable, would scarcely recognize Spring at all when it first arrives. Its skirmishers would seem to them like another phase of Winter, perhaps, or at any rate something disagreeable and to be avoided, such as March mud. It is almost a sign of Spring for us when we have to carry wax in our pockets on a ski run, applying it frequently. It is a sign of Spring when the runner ruts on the roads begin to fill with slush at mid-day, and bare patches appear on

favoured southern slopes. From long experience, we are under no delusion that Winter is preparing for a hasty retreat. The old fellow has several batteries of snow and sleet yet to discharge, and many a skirmisher of Spring will fall before the main forces come up and win back our land. But these first brushes with the oncoming green hosts are more fascinating than the final conquest, just as the dramatic moment at Lucknow was not when the relief party entered the fort, but when the bagpipes first were heard, far off and faint.

Moreover, in the earliest manifestations of Spring there is an actual beauty like nothing else at any season. I recall once going up by the old road over October Mountain to help a neighbour drive home some cows he had bought. We were forced to leave the wagon at the foot, because as soon as the road left the valley and began to ascend through the woods it was deep with soft snow. It was a bright, clear morning that might have been in midwinter, we thought as we plodded up, save that the brook was running free of ice, we tramped without our sweaters, and in the bare woods the chickadees were fluttering silently. In midwinter they would all have been close to our dwellings. But when we drove down the cows at two o'clock, the scene was transformed. We splashed along through water, for the two runner ruts in the road were now little silver brooks, flashing and dancing in the sun. The battle was on, and the first victory had gone to Spring!



The snow was beginning to retreat down the mountain side. It still held in the woods, but here in the road it was in full rout, and beside the road, too, the brook had risen to a rushing, milky torrent which eddied about the stems of the alders and swayed their swollen buds like some silent, violent wind.

There comes a day in the first advent of Spring when a perverse thermometer, which has been plunging nightly below frost line and creeping too briefly up at noon, suddenly takes a jump. The air is balmy, the sun is bright, there has been no frost the night before to make a glistening mud-skin on the walks; the dead leaves, which have apparently rotted down during the winter, are dry, at least on the surface, and rustle about in a caressing wind. Though snowdrifts yet linger under the evergreens and in northward shelters, the footing is firm over the lawn, and the woods call. You cross fields that are bare of snow, the brown and palest straw colour of dead weeds and grasses, and enter the woods on the first slope of the mountain. What an exquisite world it is! The birches shine white, as if new-washed by Winter. The chestnuts are gray, the poplars have a yellow tinge. The forest floor, lying plain to view now with no shadowing foliage, is a brown and gray carpet, almost silvery in texture here and there, for dead leaves under a recently melted snowdrift often seem to bear a film of gray mould. The interlacing branches overhead make an exquisite tracery against the sky and dapple the ground

with delicate shadows. Many plants, too, especially the perennial ferns, have come through the Winter green and fresh, so that it almost appears as if some gardener had been here already, getting his first spring planting done. But the greatest charm of the woods on this bright morning is the water. Just on this day, perhaps, can you see it. Yesterday the melting process was too slow. To-morrow the run will be over. But, for this once, those lingering white drifts you see up the slope, under a protecting boulder or in the shadow of the evergreens, are pouring down little brooks of dancing quicksilver over the forest floor. They follow no worn channels; they flow not to rule or boundary. Over the brown leaves they come, by any little hollow, irresponsible, twinkling, with the softest of plashing sounds as one of them jumps over a fern-covered rock or the root of an aged chestnut, and sinks into the moss or the mould.

And the smell of the forest that day! It is the smell of sweet, black humus, just exposed. It is the smell of dead Winter. It is the indescribable smell of pure ice water running over leaves. If you know it, you know it. If not, no description can bring the odour to your nostrils. It is the first and sweetest smell of Spring.

On such a day, too, the upland pastures, clear of the woods, have their own little ice-water brooks that run and spread and reunite over the dead grass, or plough tiny channels through the soil, the spongy, soft soil, free

at last of frost on the surface and almost too yielding to the feet. The lone chestnuts or maples which sentinel such a pasture bear as yet no sign of life, though if you break a twig from the maple a crystal drop of sap will form, which you let fall on your tongue to taste its faint sweetness. But though the maples and chestnuts are bare as in Winter, looking over to the doming slope of birch forest across the ravine, where the sun hits it full and warm, you catch, or think you do, the frailest wraith of fuzzy colour in the treetops. It is as intangible as a dream; a cloud dusks the sun, and it is gone. Yet you are sure it is there, the birth-blush of the foliage. In the upland pasture, too, on such a day, a stone wall running east and west will present a curious contrast, for on the northern side will lie a snowdrift, still a foot or two deep, perhaps, with the snow darkened by the wind-blown particles of bark and litter deposited during the Winter, and melted into coarse texture like rock salt; while on the southern side, beneath the dead stalks of last year's mulleins, milkweed, and golden-rod, the ground will be quite dry for several feet out, and you are irresistibly drawn to lie down upon it, warm and sheltered, and get your first lazy feel of Mother Earth. Here, also, as you lie out of the wind on the south side of the wall, you will catch the first subtle ground smell of the Spring.

Like the two sides of the stone wall are the two sides of the sweet-pea trenches, dug the previous Autumn, and

the two sides of the mound of excavated earth beside them. The south side of the trench, in shadow, is frozen solid, while the north side grows softer and mushier day by day. The side of the piled earth exposed to the sun is also soft, the dark side hard as ever. Day after day in March I have watched those trenches, testing with a pick or spade to see when I could begin to sow. Ultimately there comes a day when enough of the ice has melted out of the trench and enough of the excavated earth has become friable, to enable me to plant. Then the carefully soaked and chipped seeds are brought forth, the labelled stakes are prepared, and into ground that, after all, is still cold and wet and full of frozen lumps, go the precious promises of bloom. More than once I have covered the row and risen the next morning to find even the tops of the labels buried in snow. But once those sweet pea seeds are in the ground, we have ceased to think of Winter. Our faces are set forward toward the Spring.

The first and sweetest sound of Spring, of course, is the song of the Hylas, those little sappers and miners of the advance guard who attack through the marshes, or even through the melted snow water in the grassy hollows beside a country road. In our Berkshire Hills Spring is late in coming, sometimes almost a month later than in New Jersey. There have been seasons when the Hylas did not sing till April (once, to prove the lateness of our season, I ran down my garden slope



on skis on April 15th.)! But, of course, we usually can count on them some time in March. On March 21, 1913, for instance, I find this entry in my diary:

It has been a warm day. The thermometer was 58° at ten o'clock to-night. The Hylas sang for the first time this season. I heard them at half-past five, just as I was straightening up my back after chopping out a stump. As usual, they were singing in the meadow across the road, and a strong south wind, blowing a gray storm-wrack overhead, brought the sound plainly, but robbed it of its peculiar Spring quality. However, the wind died at sunset, the moon came out, and we sat on the veranda after dinner for the first time since last Summer. Then the song of the frogs drifted to us with the chime of distance, beating in its peculiar wave-like rhythm (or is that rhythm a trick of the ear?) upon our consciousness, and mingling with the fragrance of damp earth. "Spring!" we said.

The Hylas are like a small boy with a pair of skates—any water will do for them. I learned to skate on the frozen gutter beside the road. The Hylas in our meadows are often thickest and most tuneful in a little swale of surface water which winds through the grass just at this flood time, and by May is quite gone. It looks from a distance like a brook, but in reality it is only a shallow depression, with grass and elm leaves at the bottom, the still, melted-snow water filling it, quite clear, but that peculiar brown of water which has stood over dead leaves. It has come with the advent of Spring; soon it will be gone. Yet it is stirring with life for the short period of its existence, and shrilly vocal.



It is at about this time that we go out in the garden one morning to see half a hundred rufous fox sparrows hippety-hopping down the paths with their characteristic rapidity. It is now that the chickadees do not have to be coaxed into replying to their love call, but will answer immediately when we whistle the three notes. It is now that we know the thrill of putting the first vegetable seeds into the open ground, which will be well-sprouted rows of peas when your summer resident arrives in May. What does he know of that first testing of the unploughed garden for underlying frost, that first afternoon of stooping toil, with sleeves rolled up and the sun at last caressingly warm on arms so white that you are ashamed of them!

This is a season of raking, too, and of little bonfires which send up a pungent smoke at first, thinning to a straight blue vapour as the wind dies and the sunset twines an amethyst veil in the lacy, naked apple boughs. There is still a chill in the gathering twilight, but not enough to drive you to your coat. You draw a little closer to the embers, poke your rake into them and stir up a flame, and then, leaning on your rake, watch the red fire-glows jumping about amid the veined skeletons of burned leaves with the discontinuity of dream images, while far off the shrill of the Hylas rises sweetly from the swamp. Does any but a gardener know this delicious moment of the Spring?

I love to smell the early spring fires from afar, to come

out on the edge of a clearing, perhaps, and look across a rolling pasture where a few belated drifts of snow are still stretched like fingers of Winter keeping a last grip on the soil, to some white house and mouse-gray barns, and to watch tiny figures moving about in the orchard, piling the litter from trimming on the fires, which are sending up their fragrant smoke plumes into the air. As the sun drops into the west, these fires will burn low and their gray smoke will be touched with salmon-rose, even as the great white cumuli drifting in the sky above. A little later, and they will glow like red eyes in the dusk of the orchard, but the pungent fragrance of their smoke will scent the quiet spring night long after the flicker of their flames has disappeared.

There is a time when Spring, to the eye, is curiously like Autumn, as if the seasons, passing one into the other, went through the same process. That is the time when the hillsides are tapestried. The colours of Spring, of course, are not quite the same, and the texture is totally different. Nevertheless, between the green of Summer and the reds and grays of Winter, comes a time both in October and in April when an intricate warm pattern is woven up the slopes.

I read in my diary for April 6th, a few years ago:

A day of alternate snow squalls and sunshine, Spring and Winter contending. Walking home past Monument Mountain we saw a steep west shoulder now take the sun, now vanish into a nothingness of white vapour. Emerging once in full

light, a long, wooded slope was a lovely pattern of lavender and straw yellow, streaked with the white verticals of young birch trees. The lavender came from birch buds in the western light, the yellow from the poplar tops. The spring where we paused to drink was gushing full, and farther along the roadside the hepaticas were brave amid last year's leaves.

But when the hepaticas have come, Winter is almost in full retreat. The lavender birch buds will soon be a frail green veil, and then, after a day of hot sun, a fresh, intense colour note on every hillside. Soon the great elm limbs that arch over our village street will be hazy with a hint of red, and then red indeed against the pale blue sky. A new note comes into the sunset then, a new star into the west. Our village street runs east and west almost on the compass line, and the winter sunset glow is framed by the delicate, naked tracery of the arching elm boughs. But when the red fuzz has suddenly appeared on the trees the whole quality of this frame is altered, and with it the quality of the western glow. It is as if a new colour note of warmth had been sounded. At the same time, too, with the lengthening twilight, comes the hour of the lone evening star, not with the suddenness of Winter, the obscuring haze of Summer, but swelling slowly into the western vista out of the afterglow, with a sweet serenity.

Now like a crop from the famous dragon's teeth the iris spears will be stiffening up all over the garden, and in the woods a wake robin will nod in a shaft of sun by

the brook. On a clear, warm morning I shall awake to a thrilling flute call just outside my window—the first white-throated sparrow! Spring will be here, the Spring of the poets, of bird song and flowers. But its sweetest moments will have passed, those first stirrings in the sod, those anticipatory sounds and odours, those whispered premonitions. Somehow, it is they that I love best.

## CHAPTER IV

### GLACIER PARK

THE lure of the prairie, the lure of the rolling plains, the lure of the sky-blue mountains! How good it was to leave the East behind, to leave behind those midland cities belching smoke, Chicago with its sooty roar, St. Paul and the muddy Mississippi! Now there was nothing but prairie, endless wheat fields level to the sky with little domestic oases where house and barns snuggled into their encircling grove, to escape perhaps the Summer sun, perhaps the inquisitive eye of the next door neighbour a mile away. Night came on the prairie, a dusky emanation from the ground, and dawn came with a wonderful orange glow, and night again. Then, at the second dawn, we looked on a different world, a treeless world but no longer an infinite calm ocean of grain. A great ground swell had crossed the universe in the night, and the green land was slowly settling down to rest again with the heaving of ten thousand billows; wave after wave of grassy slope, heave after heave of the restless land, all day beside the rushing train. And then the miracle, the sky-blue mountains!

They have no foothills, these Rocky Mountains of



ours in northwestern Montana. Naked and sudden, they leap up out of the prairie grass, a vast blue range of them vanishing into the north, vanishing into the south, on their march from the Arctic ice to the Equator. They march beside the prairie flowers, their snowfields glittering white above the carpet of lupines and gailardias, and whisper of the mysteries their blue folds hold. At three o'clock you see them sharp and clear, but not till eight do you reach them, and as you leave the stuffy train a wind is coming down from those snowfields, over the fringing forest of fir, cool, caressing, fragrant. "Open your eyes," they say to you. Then, "Open your lungs and breathe, deep, deep!" But the twilight rose is blushing now on the snowfields, a pearly blue to the eastward has made the rolling prairie as the sea. "Now, open your heart," they say, "for you are doomed to be our lover."

The road northward into the depths of the range, once only a dim trail but now passable for motors, runs for a considerable distance over the prairie, as if it were looking for an opening where it could squeeze into the blue wall. No entrance could be better devised, for a mountain, a lovely vale, a rock-walled lake, resents too sudden an approach. Even in so little a thing as a garden, the wise man knows it must not all be visible from the veranda, or a secret magic has escaped. There must be climaxes and surprises, and at least one nook which shuts out all view save of itself. So the mountain

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range, even the individual peak, must be seen afar, then nearer with the play of different lights upon it, then skirted, perhaps, to observe its varying contours (for the beautiful mountain, like the perfect statue, must give pleasure from any angle), before it becomes intimate, familiar, and ready to disclose its secrets. So we travelled up the northward road, over the rolling prairie where gaillardias, blue lupine, orange paintbrush, lavender, bergamot, and many other flowers growing thickly in the grass made the treeless slopes one vast expanse of magic carpet, and the blue range marched with us, wearing its upper snowfields like shoulder mantles and thrusting out rock buttresses to our feet, red and brown and green and gold with the colours we were soon to know so well.

Now and then, as a cañon opened westward toward the main ridge of the Continental Divide, we saw a lake embosomed, and now and then arose some peak of peculiar dignity which captured our admiration. It is odd how potent over the spirit are certain contours. The span of the Brooklyn Bridge whispers of infinity and holds the same beauty as the misty view down the Lower Bay where the great ships go out to sea. The span of the Williamsburg Bridge is so ugly that nobody looks at it a second time. Mountains are seldom so ugly as that, but it is only the rare summit which sweeps up in dome-like serenity and seems a symbol of the infinite. Such a mountain is old Rising Wolf, be-



The snow-field of Chaney Glacier beating like surf  
against the cliff walls



side Two Medicine Lake on the eastward side of the range. How romantic its name, to the American who from earliest boyhood has thrilled to the tales of trappers and Indians! Rising Wolf was the Indian title for Hugh Monroe, an Englishman born in Montreal in 1798, and probably the first white man to behold these mountains. He was a trapper for the Hudson Bay Company, married a Blackfoot squaw, and spent most of his long life in this region, dying in 1896 and resting now beside the Two Medicine River, under the shadow of that great red rock pile which bears his name, a pyramid such as no Pharaoh ever dreamed. Almost 9,000 feet in height, standing free of the range to its base, four-square and self-sufficient, with the curve of infinity over its doming summit, old Rising Wolf sentinels the Great Divide, the Mousilauke of the Rockies, the promise of that benignant sweetness and splendid spaciousness which is to come.

By riding thus free of the range, too, we gained an insight into its topography. Possibly others are not like me, but I fancy many are. For my part, at least, I cannot be happy in a new country till I know, as we Yankees say, "how the land lays." First I must know which is north and which is south, and if I arrive by night, or get turned about on the train, I am miserable till the compass directions are straightened out in my mind. Once, I recall, a perverse sun rose for three days in the west, till I got a map and went carefully over my



line of approach. Next I must know which way the water flows, and get the feel of the division ridges, the contour of the country. Many a time after riding in a motor car over a new region, I have been miserable until I could walk a few miles, to catch from my own exertions the sense of rise and dip, to explore with a quiet eye the valley ramifications. Hence the long ride up beside the Lewis Range was, for me, a necessary introduction. I was getting my bearings. I was seeing for myself the truth of what the literal Park folders had told me.

Both the great northwestern prairie and the area now split by mountain ranges were once lake or sea bottom. By some pressure on the earth's crust a great crack was formed, and one edge of the crust came up over the other, sliding eastward from twelve to fourteen miles. In Glacier Park it is called the Lewis Overthrust. As this crust was thousands of feet thick, it is easy to see that a vast line of precipice was formed, exposing every strata of soil and rock deposited during untold ages before. Behind this precipice, for many miles, was the hump made by the overlapping earth crust. Untold ages since this upheaval have broken down this precipice and carved this hump. Melting snows have made vast erosion valleys. Frost and storm have swept down shale slides into heaps at the base, the ice masses of the glacial age ground out punch bowls or cirques, and excavated cañons. But even to the casual eye the line

of the Overthrust is still visible to-day, a vast, broken, pitted wall of petrified earth crust, strata after strata of pink and gray and brown and green and white and red stone laying their parallels one above the other up the face of precipices, with the abrupt head wall of the Continental Divide at the end of every erosion cañon, shooting straight up three or four thousand feet to the castellated, knifeblade summit ridge where only the goats and eagles dwell.

Up one of these cañons we turned at last, climbing to a beautiful sheet of milky green water in an evergreen frame, and bearing the silly name of Lake McDermott. Here, on its shore, was a great hotel. Standing at our window in this hotel, at sunset, we looked out across the milky green lake and its dark fringes of firs to the pyramid of Sharps Peak towering over us. Behind that, to left and right, we saw the vast sawtooth cliffs of the Divide, holding to the south the snows of Grinnell Glacier high on its shoulders and then leaping up to the lofty rock ridgpole of Gould Mountain, feathery white now with a fresh fall of snow, on the north climbing to the blue-gray pyramid of Mount Wilbur and then curving in a magnificent circle of castellated ridges around the hole where Iceberg Lake lay hidden. Over them all was a sweet sunset sky flecked with every tint of mother-of-pearl. The green lake, the dark firs, the stupendous nakedness of rock, and yet the sweet, clear calmness of the whole composition, was such a

combination as we had never experienced in the high hills, at once awesome and benignant. Later, as we came to know these mountains as our friends and comrades, we knew that effect to be the soul of Glacier Park.

When you mount your horse for your first day on the trail in the Rocky Mountains you feel a Columbus embarking for the Unknown which calls you deeper into the shadow of those towering cliffs. You are intoxicated with the air, lured by the summons of the high places. Put a boy in a pasture, and he makes for the top of the largest boulder. Go into Glacier Park, and your feet itch for the upland passes. And if, by chance, you are not a horseman (or horsewoman), your first day's emotions are likely to be somewhat complicated. Your cowboy guide, who knows no more of mercy—so the woman declares who is sitting a horse for the first time—than he knows of the names of the peaks or the wild flowers (and that is very little!), sets off at a brisk trot at the head of the procession, and his motley cavalcade come bouncing along behind him strewing hairpins by the way. But no trot lasts long in Glacier Park. Set out whither you will, a grade awaits you that pulls your horse down to a walk, a patient, weary walk carefully calculated to take you as close to the abrupt edge of the narrow trail, where it creeps around a precipitous slope, as it is possible to go without falling off. Women give up their ancient prerogative of

screaming after an hour or two, in sheer weariness (all but the "womanly woman," who keeps it up for a day), a set expression of terrified resignation taking the place of oral appeal. Always, here, as in other mountains, the first few miles of a trail are through timber, with only occasional glimpses between the tree trunks of the peaks beyond, standing up now in the morning light, at evening, on the return journey, taking the rose of sunset on their snow caps. A mountain summit seen through the columnar aisles of a forest, however, its lower slopes screened out, rises with an isolated majesty against the sky, ethereal and alone. Up the first few miles of the trail it beckons you, down the last few it bids farewell.

But it was when we broke out of timber into a glimpse of our first upland meadow that I knew I was lost, I was a slave forever to the Rocky Mountains. The sirens were singing beside the path, little brooks of ice water tumbling down from the snowfields just above. Upon a cliff sat the Lorelei, and combed her hair of spun silver, which came streaming down the dripping ledge of red and green and purple rock—and she, too, was singing. At her feet grew yellow columbine, blue larkspur, lupine, and false forget-me-not. In her hand she held a dark red monkey flower. Over her, dwarfed like a print by Hiroshige, a twisted, limber pine flaunted its pink cone buds. And she looked up to a towering cliff wall three thousand feet high, and she looked down over

the trail deep into a rich glade carpeted with green grass, a carpet pricked with golden dog-tooth violets, on which snow patches lay like great bear rugs and evergreens in groups were the figures forming for a minuet. This glade rose in a series of terraces, and over each terrace poured the white cascade of a brook. The last terrace led to Iceberg Lake, which we now could see ahead of us, lying at the base of a vast semicircle of naked rock, a precipice four thousand feet from the glacier at the foot to the castellated battlements which cut against the sky, red its predominant colour, a great smash in the face, an astonishing revelation in one sheer jump of the Great Divide—and it frowning down upon a meadow starred with violets, where fir trees were the stately figures in a minuet, where little ice-water rills sang seductively, where sky-blue forget-me-nots looked up from the crannies and columbines nodded in a wandering wind! There is nothing wonderful in the fact that we moulded snowballs in our shirt sleeves by the shore of the lake, which in mid-July was still a sheet of snow-covered ice, nor chopped up its frozen greenness to make our iced tea. The wonder is this conjunction of the stupendous with the delicate, the Grand Cañon with something even softer, greener, and more intimately alluring than the Berkshires or the Lake Country. The dog-tooth violets come up as fast as the drifts disappear; many an impatient one we found blossoming bravely through two inches of snow, in fact;



and they sometimes star the ground for acres, a veritable cloth of gold, at the feet of Dantean shale piles, frowning red precipices, or hanging masses of the snow that never melts. When they are gone, sister flowers take their place. Always there is bloom and colour, always the soft tinkle of water and the wine of a wandering wind.

All days are not fair in the Park, of course, though the proportion to one who has been accustomed to the White Mountains or the Adirondacks seems very high, and it is strange at first to waken morning after morning and find the daybreak rosy on cloudless summits, while a good camera will pick out the pattern of a man's clothes half a mile away, so brilliantly sharp is the atmosphere. Clouds do come, however, settling down in a vast, dun pall over the Divide, and forming a restless roof over the cañoned amphitheatres which lie in the curves of this majestic wall. On such days the colour seems to go out of the rocks, only a streak of dull red here and there remaining. The wild-flower carpet loses its vividness. The snowfields look sooty and cold. You are chiefly aware of the great precipices hemming you in and shooting up into the driving scud, their tops invisible, prison walls of a height that might be infinite. The spirit, on such a day, is unspeakably depressed, and yet there is a strange joy, too, the joy of facing anything in Nature so seemingly stupendous.

For two such days we waited, impatient, for the

clouds to lift from the Great Divide that we might cross by one of the high passes. Far to the eastward we could see the sun on the prairie, and at length we decided that by the same token it might be shining over the range, so at noon we set out, with a pack train and guides—twenty horses in all—up the switchbacks of the head wall which leads to Swift Current Pass. There are no gaps in the Continental Divide; a pass is merely a col, as low as possible, between two higher summits. Swift Current Pass, just above a hanging glacier of the same name, is more than seven thousand feet above sea level; but at this point the Divide is perhaps a quarter of a mile wide, not, as in many places, a knifeblade ridge. We went up the steep switchbacks, past the glacier, into a dense cloud, the horses picking their way carefully over extensive snowfields, and entered a small level meadow, ground squirrels chattering at us and a ptarmigan hen and her chicks, the colour of the rocks, scattering away into the low shrubbery. We crossed the meadow to the western side, and suddenly, without warning, we looked out under the cloud, across ten miles of hole, to the Livingstone Range, which stood up nobly in full sunlight, peak after peak of mysterious blue, snowcapped and snowmantled, stretching northward out of sight! Directly opposite stood Heaven's Peak, which, when snow-blanketed, has real Alpine quality. The whole western range, in fact, more nearly merits the term Alpine than the eastern,



Waterfalls dropping from Grinnell Glacier to the  
meadow levels



but only so long as the snowcaps last. Between us and Heaven's Peak was a hole of unfathomed depth. As we began to descend, realizing that the storm had been entirely centred over the crest of the Continental Divide, we could see into this hole, which was disclosed as a double cañon entirely wooded with huge evergreen timber. We camped that night in the clouds, above the tops of the primeval forest.

The next morning the descent began to the bottom of the cañon between the two ranges. The good trail had ceased. Uncle Sam doesn't care what becomes of you beyond the pass. We scrambled down three thousand feet, walking our horses most of the way and chopping out fallen logs, getting into larger and larger timber as we dropped. This forest is not comparable, of course, to the stands of Oregon fir in the Cascades, but it is a splendid wood, none the less, chiefly white pine, fir and tamarack, averaging at least sixty feet of clear stump before a limb is reached. At the bottom of the cañon we turned up Mineral Creek by the dim trail which leads ultimately to Waterman Lake and Canada, a trail known of old to the smugglers, and plodded on for a dozen miles through the forest, seeing no wild thing, hearing no birds, hardly glimpsing even the walls on either side. Then, in late afternoon, we began to go up again. We saw the Continental Divide above the trees to the east. To the west we saw the cliffs of Flattop Mountain, the long, low ridge which splits the cañon.



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The timber rapidly stunted till we were in open groves of balsam only twenty feet high but at least fifty years old. We began to cross little silvery brooks of ice water every hundred feet. The horses were weary and the women were dangling on the horns of their saddles when we reached our camping place, on the shoulder of the Divide where it dips to six thousand feet and crosses from the western range to the eastern. The horses were turned loose and driven up toward the snowfields to graze, their herd bells tinkling. Tents were pitched, balsam beds cut, and supper cooked. The total absence of hard wood in the Park makes cooking a smoky and difficult task, but that is the only drawback to camping bliss. Rills of purest ice water ran past our tents on either side, the lingering northern sunset painted redder the red rocks of the Divide to the east and put a blush on the snow-white face of Heaven's Peak, while under a salmon sky to the south all the huddled mountains twenty miles or more away, including the precipices of Cannon and the ten-thousand-foot peak of Jackson, were like burnished billows of gunmetal, turning slowly to amethyst. No one thought of the War, no one missed his evening paper. In this exquisite solitude, while night stole over the eastern bulwark and the brooks whispered in the cool dark, and from the ghostly snowfield far above us the tinkle of our herd bells dropped faintly down, it was utterly impossible to bring the mind to think of "civilization" and

its complexities. At nine o'clock the camp was still. I heard one lone coyote barking just before I dropped to sleep.

The next day we climbed a peak that promised, according to the topographical map, a splendid prospect. A rope was necessary on part of the climb, over slippery snowfields and around certain transverse ledges of treacherous shale rock, but probably only the academic climber is interested in such details, unless the climb is made up some peak of peculiar fame or danger. Every step of the first conquest of the Matterhorn is, of course, an epic! Our first objective was a col in the Divide, on the eastward side of which we knew lay Chaney Glacier. We reached this col in two hours, finding the Divide here but a few feet across. On the other side we looked directly down on the glacier, now but a vast, unbroken snowfield which swept against the red cliff walls in long white slides like surf beating up the coast of Maine. Half a mile out the glacier dropped off into space, and beyond the rim we could see the cañon of the Belly River holding in its depths a lake of iceberg green which turned to vivid lilac when a cloud shadow crossed it. North of the cañon, and not more than ten or a dozen miles from our perch, rose the grim rock pyramid of Mount Cleveland, 10,500 feet, the highest mountain in the Park, though far from the most impressive. To the northeast, beyond the cañon mouth, was the infinite ocean, still and level to the horizon a hun-

dred miles away. Reason told us it was the Alberta prairie, but the illusion of the sea was too perfect to give reason a voice.

From this col four of us kept on up the peak, now but a steep naked pyramid of shale stone, with exquisite tiny gardens of pink moss campion, mountain saxifrage, mist maidens, rosewort, and other Alpine flowers half hidden in sheltered crannies. We could see nothing but the sky as we climbed, and the rock in our faces. The prospect we sought remained for a climax when the apex was reached. In his address, "In Praise of Omar," John Hay tells how he rose one morning in camp on the summit of the Great Divide and heard a frontiersman quoting:

"'Tis but a tent where takes his one day's rest  
A Sultan to the realm of Death addrest;  
The Sultan rises, and the dark Ferrash  
Strikes, and prepares it for another guest."

The guide of our party was a frontiersman, a lover of this mountain world, blue-eyed, lean, taciturn, efficient. Another member was a well-known mountaineer and mountain lover, one of the few men who have ever scaled the north wall of Mount Baker. Another was an eastern artist. The fourth member has known the Rubaiyat by heart for twenty years, and is not unacquainted with other exalted expressions of emotion. But, as our faces came up over the crest, as we crouched

in the high wind on the summit rock no larger than a good-sized clothes closet and faced the first shock of that prospect, not one of us quoted Omar Khayyam. Not one of us gave expression to an exalted emotion in supposedly fitting words. On the contrary, what each of us said is unfit for print. We swore! Each according to his capacity, we swore—reverently, heartily, though with gasping breath, and the frontiersman was the most expressive. There are moments when formal rhetoric does not seem to fit!

To our right, on a high shelf of the Divide, hung a small glacier, feeding a white stream which leaped out over the precipice and vanished. Directly under our feet the mountain fell away in a clean drop of at least three thousand feet, so that we lay on our bellies in the high wind, to toss a stone over. Far beneath us, at the bottom of the hole, lay a peaceful green lake. Out of this lake, on the other side, rose the steep *débris* pile from the sides of Mount Merritt, and then the sheer gray and brown battlements of the mountain itself, so steep that not even a snowfield could cling to them, up, up, to the level of our faces, and then up still another thousand feet to the almost ten thousand-foot castellated summit, a mile-long ridge of battlements. No house, no trail, no human thing was visible from this perch—only a vast hole into the earth with a sweet green lake at the bottom; only rearing precipices and distant, tumbled peaks and glaciers, and far off the

green ocean of the prairie. There was no sound but the rushing of the summit wind and the faint roar of water falling three thousand feet.

Presently we suggested to the artist that he make a sketch, but he sadly shook his head.

"It can't be done!" he answered.

There are times when Man is humble.

A great deal has been written by mountaineers about the joys of climbing. The joys of climbing are often a good deal like those of heavy dumb-bell exercises. In Glacier Park you want to sing the joys of coming back to camp in the afternoon and loafing on a bed of balsam boughs, with your tent flap open wide to the view of lupines and violets in the meadow and distant, snow-capped peaks beyond. You want to sing the joys of fragrant food and steaming tea, of twilight slowly gathering as though so fair a day were reluctant to depart. To ascend a peak, to see the tumbled world at its wildest; to sit again in camp, tired and warmed with food, to hear with one ear the camp cook telling bear stories, with the other the bird-like calls of the ground squirrels; to smell the resinous wood smoke and the balsams, to catch now and then the tinkle of little ice-water brooks from the snowfields, to watch the sunset blush on Heaven's Peak and the stars come slowly out above the battlements of the Divide—well, that is, I fear, to spoil you for any other life. The little ice-water brooks sing a siren song in the uplands starred with



violets, and woe to him whose ears have heard! He can never be quite happy again east of the Great Divide.

So I might continue the tale of the days when we drove our pack train through the Park, over high passes, across precipitous snowfields where a slip would have meant death, but too confident now on our horses to worry, camping by glacier lakes of milky green, scrambling over goat trails on the backbone of the continent, cooking our luncheon in gardens where by careful count as many as thirty wild flowers grew in a space the size of an ordinary room—chalice cups like white *anemone Japonica*, lupine, larkspur, pink spiraea, orange paintbrush, false forget-me-not, columbines, tiny twin flowers, and the stately spikes of the Indian basket grass like an army with banners. But the names of the hills and passes would mean little to the reader who has not seen them, though to one who has, each name is a magic invocation, bringing the memory of some splendid rock pile, some alluring meadow, some campfire doused with wistful reluctance. “Beyond the Alps lies Italy”; but beyond Gunsight Pass lies Logan’s Pass, and beyond that another, and beyond that another. The range is endless, and the image of tumbled peaks and magic meadows, each with its own individual charm, stretching into the north, into the south, mile after hundred mile, captures the imagination.

Two names, however, I cannot forego to mention, one

the name of perhaps the most beautiful rock pile on the continent, the other of the most beautiful meadow, the meadow where Pegasus must once have browsed and the white feet of Aphrodite twinkled on the grass. Going-to-the-Sun Mountain, by some happy miracle, bears a name that is worthy of it. It rises abrupt and sheer out of the green mirror of St. Mary Lake, five thousand feet of naked wall from the lake shore, its summit almost ten thousand above sea level. It is devoid of timber, even of visible vegetation, and loses its snow early. In colour it is gray flushed with pink, and from the lake shows as an almost perfect pyramid with the apex removed making a level summit. Viewed, however, from up the cañon, its shape is totally different. Then its sides are far more precipitous, its summit wider, and as the low afternoon sun strikes along its great buttressed flank vast masses of lavender shadow and thousand-foot high lights mould it into an architectural structure of ethereal solidity, a vast cathedral of the primeval earth spirit. Some day its name will be famous among mountains.

Piegan Meadow! All the morning we had plodded up the long trail over Piegan Pass, at first directly under and then across the cañon from the absolutely precipitous wall of Gould Mountain where a silver waterfall was descending for three thousand feet, like the hair of *Mélisande*, its soft thunder windborne to our ears. We crossed the summit in deep snow, amid a jumble of naked



From Iceberg Lake magnificent battlements tower four thousand feet into the air



shale heaps like a Doré dream. We descended, long past the noon hour, under a hot sun, by a trail which was dug into a shale slide—a half hour to reach the little figures which we saw plodding up, even their faces distinct a mile away, another half hour to reach the bottom of the shale, where the limber pines began and the smell of ice-water rills was good in the horses' nostrils. We swung at a trot around the base of a precipice—and the meadow lay before us.

It was, perhaps, a mile wide, a deep cup between beetling cliffs which held glaciers in their upper pockets. On the southerly edge it dropped off into space. It was carpeted with lush, emerald grass, plentifully studded with gnarled, Japanese-like limber pines gay with red cone buds, sprinkled everywhere with nodding, golden, dog-tooth violets, and criss-crossed with tiny rills of ice water from the patches of white snow, rills which sparkled and flashed silver in the sun. But that was not all. Looking out over the green and gold carpet, beneath the frame of some twisted pine branch, you gazed across the hole where the meadow disappeared in space, and ten miles away, at the end of the vista, rose serenely the ten thousand feet of Mount Jackson, a pyramid of white and blue, with the great snow mantle of Blackfeet Glacier glistening on its shoulder. Piegan Meadow! It has no rival in mountain loveliness. The hour was perilously late when we poured the nectar from one of the ice-water rills on our campfire and heard the



embers sizzle, saddest of sounds when the camp has been a happy one. We paused at the edge, looking down into the dark forest far below us, where already the evening shadows were gathering. Behind, in the meadow, the sun was still bright; the yellow lily bells of the dog-tooth violets were nodding in a vagrant wind; we could hear the murmur of the little brooks that flow softly over grass. I never took a downward step with more reluctance.

I am back in the East now, but I cannot forget that magic meadow of green and gold on Piegan Pass, nor a certain campfire under Rising Wolf, nor the evening shadows on the noble flanks of Going-to-the-Sun, nor the faint, far thunder of waterfalls in the night, nor the siren song of the little ice-water brooks in the uplands starred with violets, nor the vast rock walls which make you humble in your flush of health and happiness.

There was a small boy in our party who, on his return to his home in the Berkshires, took a long look at Mount Everett, at all the hills about his dwelling, at the pastures and ploughed fields, and then remarked sadly: "Father, this is practically a prairie!"

I know exactly how he felt.

## CHAPTER V

### WHERE GLACIERS FEED THE APPLE ROOTS

(LAKE CHELAN)

WHERE the milky green waters of the Columbia River roll steadily or churn into impatient rapids south-westward in mid-Washington, looking for an opening in the great Cascade Range that they may break through to the Pacific, lies a land not many years ago a desert, but now producing magnificent apples, apricots, and cherries from its one-time seemingly hopeless soil. It is a narrow land between high, basaltic cliffs and jagged mountain walls, into which the river has cut still deeper, a land of naked rock, of gray volcanic dust and green sage brush, an arid land for all the water surging by, water almost the exact colour of the sage. Before man came the landscape was forbidding, dismal, a thing of rock nakedness, of sage-green and dusty gray. Only the eternal sweep of the great river and the occasional glimpses of the far blue mountains whitened with snow redeemed it from the sense of some primal curse. Then man arrived, to build irrigation basins up in the hills where the winter snows lay late, to run pipe lines down to the flats of gray volcanic ash—and

the desert was no more. Acre after acre blossomed and bore fruit, towns sprang up, the smoke of homes ascended from the midst of each ten-acre square of green trees and alfalfa which now covered the floor of the valley like a vast checkerboard. There, where the oldest orchard boasts but a scant thirty years, its trees so far as age is concerned but mere striplings beside the orchards of New England—though in actual growth the disparity is hardly apparent, thanks to the tremendous fertility of volcanic ash and humus—is now a new industry, a new community of agricultural pioneers who have made the apple a work of art.

They have done it with the aid of the mountain snows, with the aid of the mountain barrier which keeps off the killing winds of Winter, which guards from frost, which seems to concentrate the long summer sunshine, above all with the aid of the volcanic ash once belched from Baker and Tacoma (or Rainier), from Glacier Peak and Adams, no doubt from the vast mountain which ages long ago towered 20,000 feet over the hole which now holds Crater Lake in Oregon. It is no wonder that the pioneers of Wenatchee and the Columbia River fruit bottoms lift up their eyes unto the hills and look with affection on the blue and white pyramids against the west.

Their towns are not yet beautiful; they are rawly new, and it takes some time to span a street with arching foliage, even when you are blest with five per cent.

of potash in your soil; it takes some time, also, to build macadam roads across miles of dusty sage brush, especially when your own two hands have more than they can do in your personal patch of orchard. Yet so much has been accomplished in so brief a span, the bustle of energy is so infectious, there are so few indications anywhere of effort abandoned, that the visitor from the East feels himself in a new world. Where he came from the orchards are often more beautiful, with the beauty of age, not infrequently of neglect. The old New England apple tree, with its jungle of suckers, its trunk gnarled and sprawling, and standing with its fellows over the gray stone wall, knee deep in grass and buttercups, is a beautiful patriarch, telling tales of other days and generations passed away. It matches the mouse-gray barn and the shabby but dignified farmhouse close by, the rolling fields beyond, the languid haze of the summer day. But the apples of Wenatchee grow on tall, upstanding trees that speak in every line of ceaseless care and lateral pruning; between the rows flow the tiny irrigation ditches, and under them flourishes the rich alfalfa. They are the very antithesis of neglect, as they surround the plain, practical, well-painted farmhouse, usurping even the doorway. Here is no languid haze on a summer day; heat, perhaps, but not haze. The eye goes out between the rows to the hollow where the mighty river runs, or down the valley to the far blue rampart of the Cascade Range

shining with snow, or up to the ragged basaltic cliffs above the cañon. It matters not what picture the vista frames, the light is glittering clear, every detail of a cliff wall five miles away is as sharp as through a field glass, the air is vibrant with its own purity. In such an orchard, in such an atmosphere, the mind turns toward the future, never the past. This is the land of what-is-to-be.

But a great river does not roll onward mile after mile chafing to get through a mountain rampart, biting an ever deeper cañon into the basalt rock and disclosing at its junction with confluent streams vistas into wild gorges or glimpses of lofty summits, snow-mantled, whence those tributaries come, without luring the traveller to climb the ragged walls and go exploring, to leave the river for the hills. So we were lured, and so we found Lake Chelan, said by some to be the most beautiful lake on the North American continent. I have not seen all the lakes on the North American continent, so I make no comparisons myself, content to state that it is the most beautiful lake I ever saw, awake or in my dreams.

We had gone northward from Wenatchee up the cañon of the Columbia, the walls narrowing in upon us, the orchards on the bank growing fewer and smaller. We alighted at a station called Chelan Falls, and the train went on, leaving us apparently the sole occupants of the river gorge. The sage-green Columbia, just



across the track, was gently hissing, with that peculiar noise a powerful stream makes when it is flowing very rapidly but not quite over rapids. In front of us the rocky cliff, with no verdure upon it except the inevitable sage brush, rose almost precipitous; but we could see the scar of a road, unfenced, which descended from the top in a series of switchbacks, dug out of the wall. Down the road a motor was coming, closely followed by a cloud of dust. A few moments later it pulled up at the platform, dust and all. There was a woman at the wheel, a woman who should have been the heroine of some western romance, her hands tanned, her shoulders square, her eyes alert, her face extraordinarily good to look upon. But, alas, her grammar was impeccable, she was mistress of the graces of sophisticated society no less than of the clutches of her car! With her brown hands on the wheel, we crawled up the cliff side to a comparatively level plain covered with gray dust and sage brush, and stretching a few miles westward to rolling hills. Over this plain we sped, and came to a little town on the shore of a lake, a town rawly new and busy, like all the others in this forward-looking land. Neither was the lake remarkable, save for its exquisite green colour. It stretched away between hilly shores, and appeared to vanish around a headland. The bounding hills, the height, perhaps, of those around Lake George, but much less precipitous, were partially timbered, partially cleared to young orchards which came

down to the water's edge. It was a gentle, somewhat pastoral scene.

"This," said our fair driver, "is Lake Chelan—or a little of it."

"Is there more?" I asked.

She smiled. "In the West," she said, "there is always more."

We abandoned the purr of the automobile for the unmuffled cough of a large motor boat, and *put-put-putted* out over the green water, a much more vivid green than the waters of the Columbia River, holding something of the blue of the sky in suffusion. We had no knowledge of our destination, no conception of what we were to see; adventurers on unknown waters, we left the dock and the crude, busy little town behind, sailing in a summer sun toward the gateway of hills where the lake disappeared northwestward. But we were aware of a cool, fresh wind in our faces, and the smell of pure water. We could not fail to note the extraordinary clarity of the atmosphere, in which we could easily detect a "rancher" working with a hoe in his newly planted orchard of young trees no taller than he, though the shore at that point was at least a mile away. We could even see the sparkle of the water in the ditch, as his hoe led the life-giving moisture down between the rows. We crowded on the forward deck, and set our faces to the wind.

The lake did not increase in breadth; it remained

seemingly about as wide as the Hudson River at Tarrytown. But no sooner had we passed around the first headland than we saw it stretching onward for many miles, till it once more disappeared around a still loftier wooded point. It may have been ten miles from the foot of the lake that we put in at a small bay where a new town was springing up, the result of a new irrigation project. The hills had already become higher, their sides more abrupt. They were crowding this new, shining little village down close to the water's edge, and the orchards, as yet only squares of brown earth with polka dots of frail green upon them where the young trees were flourishing, were pushing bravely up the slopes into the fir timber, clinging to every sheltering shelf. There was something heroic about this orchard town on the very outskirts of cultivation. These orchards were the first-line trenches in man's battle with the soil. Just beyond the town the boundaries of the Chelan National Forest began, the hills arose still more abruptly, there was no foothold for the orchardist. He had pressed forward as far as he could go, and the Swiss peasant's herd bells tinkling on the meadows under snow line, so celebrated in song and story, are no more romantic than these last orchards clinging to the mountainside above the green water of Lake Chelan.

When our boat rounded the next headland, we saw the lake still stretching northwestward, but no longer a jewel in a pastoral setting. A few last orchards, the

ultimate outposts, still clung to the precipitous shores, but for the most part these shores rose too abruptly from the water to give any foothold, and bared ledges of rock began to crop out, crowned with spired firs. The wind, drawing down the lake, was churning the surface into a considerable sea. Ahead of us loomed a superb portal to still-further-unseen reaches of the lake, a natural gateway like that to the Highlands of the Hudson between Storm King and the Point, but with each precipitous mountain forest-clad and devoid of any human habitation, and rising nearly five thousand feet sharp out of the water. Between these splendid headlands, sentinels of the major range beyond, Lake Chelan stretched its dancing green pathway, foam-flecked and sky-tinted, whispering of magic splendours yet to come.

Once you have entered through this majestic portal, you have left the lowland world behind, the world of orchards and of men, of roads and barns, of strife and barter. You are afloat on an inverted sky in the heart of the primal wilderness, in the depths of the tumbled mountains. The lake grows no wider; if anything it narrows. But it stretches onward for another forty miles between two unbroken walls of naked precipice and fir-clad slopes rising to castellated summits of progressively greater height till the snowfields begin to glitter far above your head and white streams begin to flash in the forest and leap out over the rocks. The

depth of a lake, as a rule, adds little to pictorial impressiveness. But the case is otherwise here. Lake Chelan is sixteen hundred feet deep, which means that its bottom is six hundred feet below sea level. As you look upon the abrupt plunge of the mountain walls into its green depths and realize that they continue their descent below the surface for more than a thousand feet, the imagination is staggered with the slit in the earth crust this Chelan cañon must have been before it was partially filled with water. For nearly forty miles it was once from one to almost three thousand feet deeper than the Grand Cañon of the Colorado—and still is, could we see to the bottom of this green mid-surface on which we float. At any point of the shore the *Mauretania* could throw a gang plank to the cliffs and never graze her keel. Putting in close, our launch took us under the spray of waterfalls and beneath hanging rock gardens of lupine and paint brush, foxglove and goat's beard, while on many a craggy headland some storm-scarred fir flung long branches southward in the lee of the twisted trunk, its northward limbs shaved off by wind and sleet.

But the full glory of Chelan lies not in its depths of green water, nor in its upleaping banks which slope back a thousand feet above water level and carry mantles of fir up to the seven-thousand-foot timber line. Its full glory is the revelation of the main Cascade Range at the head of the vista, a procession of pyramidal peaks



glittering with ice and snow, which come out of the north, pass across the range of vision, and disappear to the south. The green lane of the lake makes directly for them; they grow nearer, putting off their blue to don the grays and pinks of naked rock, the different textures of glacier ice and temporary snowfield becoming more and more distinct. At the last, the spur peaks which bound the lake are as high as the summits of the Cascade Divide, and they, too, are capped with the eternal snows. The lake ends against a cliff wall adorned with Indian pictures and the initials of the inevitable American vandals, and in a little sedgy meadow beside the cliff, through which the Stehekin River pours in its milky waters direct from the high glaciers. Here is journey's end, and here, the last bulwark of the lake, Castle Rock springs up against the west, rearing its fairy battlements eight thousand feet aloft and taking the sunset in rose and gold long after the twilight shadows have dusked the lapping water and the evening lamps are lit.

Again, while the morning mists are still hovering wraiths over the lake or cling like veils to the Douglas firs on the lower slopes, these fairy towers catch the rising sun, and send its welcome down to those below.

“Full many a morning have I seen the sun  
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye. . . .”

Inevitably those words occur to you as the sky-borne rocks blush and burn with salmon-rose and gold,

while the green lake beneath is a dim, quiet mirror, as if the breath of night were still clouding it. If on the little hills of England, Shakespeare could find immortal imagery, what heights of splendour would he not have scaled could he have seen the sunrise over Lake Chelan! Or would he have been dumb, and gone a-fishing? Sometimes it is not the largest prospect, nor indeed the largest event, which evokes the magic utterance.

The entire upper water-shed of Lake Chelan, including so much of the main Cascade Range as feeds the Stehekin River, to the summit of the Divide, is a national forest, which means that the region is threaded with rangers' trails practical for horses. The name of War Creek Pass appealed to me. It was a person deluded by love who asked: "What's in a name?" There is everything in a name. Agnes Falls, which the map showed me descending over a close maze of contour intervals, left me quite cold for all the promised drop. "David Copperfield" spoiled the name Agnes for me many years ago. But War Creek Pass! That suggested something rugged and difficult, that breathed the romance of the ancient days when the Indians went over the range by this route to attack their enemies to the north. My feet should climb where their moccasins had found the way, and I would look down upon the same world they looked down upon, for man as yet has made no scar on this tumbled

wilderness of peak and glacier. The horses were brought forth, and we strung out in single file for War Creek Pass.

The trail for several miles leads sharply upward through the peculiar Cascade forest—peculiar, to an Easterner, because it is at once meadow, garden, forest, and rock precipice. The trees, for the most part great upstanding Douglas firs, with a considerable admixture of cedar and some hardwoods, on this side of the range do not grow thickly together like a stand of eastern pine or hemlock. The forest energy seems to have concentrated into single specimens often a hundred feet apart, which rear brown trunks for fifty or seventy-five feet without a limb. In our eastern woods a tree so isolated would throw lateral branches, and we develop no such shaggy columnar trunks rising from steep lawns of grass, their feet set firm in beds of wild flowers. Almost the first garden we came upon, close to the water's edge, was a great bed of foxgloves on either side of a tiny brook. Every year in my garden I sow these queenly biennials, transplanting and retransplanting the young plants, nursing them tenderly through the Winter, and deploring their later tendency to throw back to magenta. Yet, in this wild garden beside the ice-water brook, self-sown and self-protected, the gorgeous spikes were growing almost six feet tall, and not a magenta one in the lot! Most of them were white, flecked with pink. Their stalks were thick and strong.

They were alike the envy and the despair of at least one eastern amateur.

Close to the foxgloves, and companioning the trail for a long distance, were several varieties of flowering shrubs, now (early in July) in full bloom. The cap-berry was perhaps the most conspicuous, a large shrub with numerous blossoms not unlike small white wild roses in appearance. But the showy goat's beard was scarcely less frequent, a bush covered with white bloom closely resembling spiraea. As the trail ascended more and more sharply, coming out now and then on a dizzy ledge far over the water, and again climbing a steep bank of the powdered, volcanic soil by a series of switch-backs, the shrubs began to drop behind and the lower wild flowers became predominant, purple lupine, sky-blue larkspur, and the flaming orange-red paint brush being the most conspicuous. Both the lupine and larkspur are known as annuals in our eastern gardens, but they do not reach the brilliance of colour they achieve in this volcanic ash, nor do we find them spread like bits of sky in every forest glade. Above all, we do not plant them—we cannot plant them—in happy conjunction with bright orange paint brush around the feet of great brown fir tree columns, with a glimpse two thousand feet below of the green water of Lake Chelan, and a vista across the cañon hole of the towering walls of Castle Rock and a dazzling snowfield! In such a grove and such a garden we let our horses rest, and looked

upon the scene. The bluish-purple lupines and the flaming paint brush, varying in colour from orange to almost pure scarlet, grew in luxurious profusion on a carpet of grass and moss. The columnar trunks were shaggy brown. Between them we looked down into a vast hole and saw the iceberg green lake at the bottom. A cloud ship was trailing its shadow anchor over the mountain wall across the lake. Down the side it came, dusking the forest. It swept out over the water, and where this shadow lay the water changed to amethyst.

We lunched at six thousand feet, on the edge of the first snowfield which was rapidly melting under a hot July sun. The snow had receded several feet in the past few days, leaving the ground bare, and through the gray scum which you always find under the accumulated Winter's snow the earliest Spring wild flowers were pushing up, especially dog-tooth violets, which six feet out from the present snow line were shaking their golden bells in the breeze. We were not above timber, however. In the White Mountains of New Hampshire timber line is at 4,500 feet. In the Alps it is at 6,400. The highest timber line that I have ever seen recorded is 13,800 feet, on Mount Orizaba, in Mexico. In Colorado and the California Sierras it is between 11,000 and 12,000 feet. Above Lake Chelan, it appears to average something under 8,000. At 6,000 feet on War Creek Pass we found the Douglas firs still of considerable girth and height, but they began rapidly to dwarf





A glimpse two thousand feet below of the green water  
of Lake Chelan



above that level, and the trail entered a belt of hardwoods, thin, close-growing, and rather naked trees, many of them winter killed and leaning against their up-standing brothers or fallen like barricades across the path. The Pass itself is merely the lowest point on the summit ridge, a col between two rock pyramids. It was not till we were almost cresting this col, at considerably more than 7,000 feet, that the wild, tortured, low-growing outpost trees of the true timber line appeared, and the true Alpine flowers in the sheltered cran-nies. The tortured trees of timber line! Nothing in nature, perhaps, is wilder and more thrilling. I have cut a mountain fir no higher than my knee which numbered fifty summers. I have walked on a trunk half as large as my body, which rose two feet from under the shelter of a rock, met the stinging storm blasts, and bent out flat parallel to the ground and grew thus for fifty feet, as though some giant steam roller had passed over it. You climb through thinning and dwarfing forests, with an ever-larger prospect opening out below you, you reach the heroic outposts of the trees, you inhale a colder, clearer air, you feel the breath of the snow, you see at last above you only the final heave of naked rock and the vast dome of the sky!

And here, at last, where the forest gave up the fight as it caught the full strength of the shearing wind, we looked into the forest world beyond the Pass, the goal of the Indians who first made the trail. We looked across

the forest into the tumbled gorges of the Cascade Range, advancing like a sea of white-capped billows in a vast wave line against the western sky. Far to the northwest rose the blue and white cone of Mount Baker. To the southwest, across the hole which held in its depths the green jewel of Lake Chelan, and seemingly but just beyond the opposite wall of that hole, lay the white-crowned ridge of Glacier Peak, 10,435 feet, the glaciers sprawling down its summit like some monstrous octopus of ice. All between was a world of upheaved magnificence, of deep ravine and sun-washed pinnacle, of naked precipices and dazzling snowfields, of dark, timbered slopes and the glimpse of flashing water. Down those six thousand feet below you lay the lake, the green pathway to this pageant of the peaks. Lake and pinnacle, forest and glacier, are dedicated to the nation; they are our own forever. Yet they are but a relatively small section of the unending range, set apart because of its perfection. A young poet of the Hood River Valley, homesick in New York, not long ago put his longing into verse. He spoke of the call of the West, and then he said:

“But mightier still than its clarion call  
Is the walloping bigness of it all,  
And you live the days when your eye swept clear  
From the slopes of Hood to old Rainier.  
Cañon on cañon—rock-ribbed piles  
Rolling away for a hundred miles—  
And the gold of the sunset on leaf and branch  
Crowding your soul like an avalanche.”

As I stood on the wind-swept col of War Creek Pass and faced the advancing wave line of the Cascade Range I knew exactly what he meant. I knew the pride that was in his heart, the hunger for this lofty spaciousness, this tempestuous beauty, that gnawed his bosom as he tramped the crowded eastern streets. Then my thoughts descended into the hole where the green lake lay, and went back down its jewelled pathway to the orchards at its lower end, fighting their way up as close as they could get to the fir-clad cliffs and the eternal snows. There was no pity in my thoughts for these pioneers of the apple, nor admiration, either. There was only envy. They dwell by one of America's noblest lakes, the great hills are their guardians, beauty their priceless heritage. The pure sap of the glaciers is in their perfect fruit. Is it not possible, is it not likely, that something of this beauty and this spaciousness will go into the generations yet to be, into the men and women, too?

I stumbled down from War Creek Pass, leading my horse till the gathering shadows made me prefer to trust his feet rather than my own—a humbler and, I trust, a better American.



## CHAPTER VI

### GLACIER PARK WILD FLOWERS

THE least impressionable person alive cannot go to the Rocky Mountains without giving enthusiastic attention to the wild flowers. This is only in part due to the individual beauty of those flowers. In the East we have many as beautiful, some more beautiful, and still more we share with the West. But it is seldom that our flowers grow in such masses and profusion, with so many kinds and colours blended on one small square of ground, and, above all, it is seldom that our flowers have the field so much to themselves, sharing it only with a little sparse grass, the scattered groups of limber pine or firs, and the ice-water brooks from the snowfields. The Rocky Mountain wild flowers often display their colours, indeed, against a backing of pure snow, or grow underneath pink and red and purple precipices, and beside lakes of iceberg green. They are a foreground of delicate beauty for a picture of stupendous impact. No other flowers have such a setting, are so intimately associated with landscape gardening in the grand style, the style of Shakespeare and of Milton.

When I went into Glacier Park, I bought a book

about the wild flowers of the North American mountains because for miles out in the prairie, as we drew near the sky-blue range, I had been seeing wonderful gardens in the grass. In fact, the prairie grass is mostly wild flowers. Since that purchase, I have been seeking everywhere to find the names of many flowers this book didn't list. It was a provokingly unsatisfactory book, especially because it failed to state the size and height of flowers, or to tell which are indigenous to the mountains. But that is neither here nor there. Some day, as travel into our western wonderland increases, the right book will be supplied at the hotels. The first, and most astonishing, omission I discovered was that of the so-called Indian basket grass, or squaw grass (*Xerophyllum tenax*). As any one who has seen it knows, the blossom of this "grass" is hardly inconspicuous. During late June and July, indeed, the tall, yucca-like stalk rising from two to six feet out of the clump of coarse, wiry leaves which the horses will not eat, and bearing its great bloom-head of creamy white flowers like a torch, is the most striking plant in the woods and meadows. It grows in among the timber; it breaks out into little glades and meadows to run riot, an army with white battle plumes; it climbs to the high "parks" just below the passes and flourishes close to the snowfields. It is delicately fragrant, extremely decorative when picked, and altogether a remarkably lovely and splendid wild flower. Naturally, it is hardy, nor does it seem to have any decided soil

preference. I am told that it has been successfully grown in the mountains of North Carolina, and it ought to thrive near timber line on Mount Washington, if some White Mountain enthusiast would take the trouble to try it. I hope some day to experiment with it in the Berkshire Hills.

Next to the squaw grass, the most conspicuous wild flower in Glacier Park is undoubtedly the dog-tooth violet (*Erythronium grandiflorum*) with its smaller variety, the *parviflorum*. There is nothing unusual about this plant, of course, as it almost exactly resembles the variety *Americanum* of the East, save that it grows taller; but it is conspicuous in the Rockies for its brave ubiquity. Naturally an early Spring bloomer, it doesn't get its chance in the upland meadows and on the high slopes till the snow melts, so that you may find its golden lily bells nodding as late as August. When a winter snowfield melts, it recedes along the edges, showing bare ground for a day or two. Up through this ground come the lily leaves of the "violets," and with great rapidity, under the hot summer sun, the plants burst into blossom. Sometimes they do not even wait for the melting. I gathered scores of them blooming through an inch or more of snow. Often the edge of a large snowfield for half a mile will be bordered with a solid belt of gold, from six to a hundred feet wide according to the rapidity with which the melting has taken place. If the snow melts slowly, other flowers

come in, and the border will mark the seasons—six feet of dog-tooth violets, then six feet of chalice cup, perhaps, then several feet of lupine or tall false forget-me-not, then vetch and pale blue clematis and yellow columbine and purple pentstemon, and so on, even to goldenrod. Sometimes, on the sides of a steep gully where the snow has packed hard and melted very slowly, these belts of bloom will be only a foot or two wide, running all the changes from earliest Spring to late Summer in a space of fifty feet.

But though when you enter an upland meadow, studded with limber pines (their own reddish pink cones a pretty blossom), and carpeted with white snow-fields bordered with gold, you are first aware of the dog-tooth violets, on closer inspection you find dell after little dell where as many as thirty varieties of plants will be blooming simultaneously. You have passed many others on the wooded trail coming up. Soon, as you leave the timber line and begin to climb those pink and red and purple cliffs which tower over you, you will find that what now looks like naked rock will be a sub-Arctic or Alpine garden, no less lovely of its kind than this incomparable meadow half way between the lowlands and the peak.

Among the woodland flowers, the arnica is omnipresent. There are several varieties, closely allied, and they literally star the woods, for their pretty, yellow, daisy-like petals, with a darker yellow centre, are borne erect

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a foot or two, over a forest floor that has little undergrowth. Associated with the woods, too, is the fairy twin flower, and the giant Indian hellebore (*veratrum viride*), with its huge, lance-like leaves and its pale white and greenish flowers. This plant, of course, is common in the East, as "false hellebore," but owing to our denser undergrowth it never seems so conspicuous.

However, it is difficult to draw the line on the slopes of the Rockies between the forest and the open, so frequent are the glades, and so much do the flowers tend to run from one to the other. The exquisite and common admixture of blue larkspur (*Delphinium Brownii* and its variations), purple lupine and Indian paint brush (which in the same group, sometimes actually in the same plant, ranges in colour from a greenish white through scarlet to its standard tone of bright, brickly orange), is found out in the open, and beside the trail through broken timber as well. It is an even more common colour combination in the volcanic soil of the Cascade Range, where acres upon acres are resplendent with blue, purple, and orange. I have brought back to the East a box of paint brush seed (*castilleja miniata*), which I hope will have a chance to try our mountain soil. But if it thrives as well in this region as its eastern cousin, the brilliant painted cup, our farmers may not thank me!

A striking plant which you frequently encounter, invariably close to the edge of a little brook, is the monkey



flower (*mimulus Lewisii*), which somewhat resembles a sturdy, dark wine-red petunia, though its irregular trumpet has a narrower opening and the petals curl back more. It, too, has an eastern relative, closely resembling it in shape, but blue instead of red, and not over half the size. The little brooks beside which the western monkey flower grows come leaping down from the snowfields or glaciers above, clear and cold as ice. Often the trail is cut along the steep side of a bank, so that they fall tinkling down to your feet, and once more leap out in a waterfall the other side of the path. Thus, on one side of you is a drop with a splendid prospect of meadow and cañon and far peaks, on the other side, so close that you can often pluck the flowers without leaving your saddle, a steep bank between little waterfalls, a bank which is a perpetual garden. You look to the left upon far tremendousness, you look to the right at the small, close, intimate world of wild flowers.

In this intimate world, the yellow *aquilegia*, or columbine, is conspicuous, and so is the false forget-me-not, which grows everywhere. It is larger and not always so true a blue as the true forget-me-not which doesn't begin to appear until the higher altitudes. But it is a lovely flower, none the less, hardly deserving to be branded "false." Delicate harebells sway here, too, in this land where all the flowers crowd Spring and Summer and Autumn into one or two brief months, and rough fleabane may be found beside tall

white *viola Canadensis*, or goldenrod beside lupine. The palely purple to blue blossom of the *clematis columbiana* grows shyly along such a bank, on vines that run for the most part on the ground, or climb a little way into the low, stunted branches of a limber pine. Near them may be golden hairy hawkweed, and just across the path on the edge of the cliff a clump of red heather, or a gay group of pinkish purple pentstemon, one of the showiest of the wild flowers. There is pink spiraea, too, and bright, golden shrubby cinquefoil, wrongly known as hardhack by our Berkshire farmers. Near it may be a striking clump of the ascending milk vetch (*astragalus adsurgens*), with its purple blooms. Another variety (the Alpine milk vetch) is smaller and paler, and grows above timber line. Both pink and white everlasting are common, too. Indeed, the bank beside you is a perpetually variegated garden, and on the other side, you look down upon meadows which are gardens, too, away to the far peaks.

There are, of course, certain flowers which you come to hold in peculiar affection, and certain spots where they grow are ever after remembered. I shall never forget, for instance, the little pine-studded meadow at the foot of Grinnell Lake. Beyond the lake the cliffs leap up to the great white mass of Grinnell Glacier, hanging on a lofty shelf of the Continental Divide. Over these cliffs waterfalls descend like silver hair, their soft thunder coming to you across the green lake. To right and

left naked rock walls tower up into peaks. Yet the moist little meadow is as intimate and peaceful as a cloistered garden, and in mid-July, when we were there, was carpeted with chalice cups. The chalice cup (*anemone occidentalis*) is, of course, in reality a spring flower. Its cream-white blossom is from one to two inches across, with a fluffy, golden-green centre. Later this fluffy seed head expands into a feathery tuft on a stalk a foot or two high, and is almost as attractive as the flower. But until you have seen a Rocky Mountain meadow carpeted with these large, beautiful, soft anemones, you cannot know their charm.

The mariposas of the Rocky Mountains are not to be forgotten, either. The green-banded mariposa (*calochortus macrocarpus*) throws up a straight, erect stem and bears a lily of three pale lilac, concave petals, with a green stripe down the centre. The *calochortus alba*, however (a variety to be had of the Montana nurserymen), found at such high altitudes as Mount Morgan Pass, where its loveliness has only the sky and mountain goat for witnesses, is the more beautiful of the two. It is like Emerson's "rose of beauty on the brow of chaos."

Nor is the traveller likely to forget certain bits of road or trailside at the foot of the range, near St. Mary Lake on the east and Lake Macdonald on the west, where Nature has planted border clumps of "wild hollyhock." This delightful plant bears a stalk from four to six feet

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high, covered toward the end with pink blossoms about the size of a wild rose, but clustered much like the hollyhock, and resembling that blossom in appearance. It has the same decorative value when picked and brought into the house, but it adds a certain shy wildness of its own. We never found this plant, very evidently a mallow of some sort, except near these two lakes, but not growing, however, in actual wet. It was not listed in my annoying book of Rocky Mountain wild flowers—there were no mallows listed there. Later it was identified as the *Sidalcea neo-mexicana*, and there is also a cream or white variety, the *candida*. This malvaceous plant would prove a rare and choice addition to any garden, but I have found only one or two Eastern houses listing anything like it.

When you pass above timber line in the Rockies, especially as far north as Glacier Park, you enter a sub-Arctic world rather than an Alpine. Timber line in the Alps is at 6,400 feet, and the summits are covered with eternal snow. Timber line, even in Glacier Park, is often more than 7,000 feet (in Colorado it is more than 11,000), and though there are numerous permanent snowfields as well as glaciers above the last twisted trees, the bulk of the great shale heaps and jagged rock towers, which are the peaks of the range, are free of snow for at least two months. In those two months the brave little blossoms of these Arctic heights concentrate their beauty and fragrance. You are

climbing Piegan Pass, for instance, which takes you close under the more than 10,000-foot summit of Mount Siyeh. You have left timber far behind, and are crawling up beside a yawning cañon hole, amid naked, broken shale, desolate beyond words or the pencil of Doré. Yet look at the ground close beside you! It is not naked. In every sheltered cranny, in every spot where a mite of soil has lodged, flowers are blooming! Some of them are so tiny that it would require a microscope to analyze them. Some, you note with surprise, are of the lowland varieties, dwarfed by the summit storms like a timber-line tree. I found a shrubby cinquefoil at almost 9,000 feet, with a stalk as large as my thumb and tough as steel; but it grew as close along the ground as a *Mitchella* vine, literally hugging the earth, and wasn't more than a foot long. Yet it was bearing blossoms quite as large as in its natural position. Here on the wind-swept uplands the true forget-me-not grows, this mountain variety being as a rule not more than six inches high, but of a marvellous cerulean blue. Here are various gentians, from true gentian blue through pinky purple to almost white. Here, too, are found the blue Greek valerians, fragrant, thick, bloom clusters on hairy stems, and a still more attractive and showy plant, the mountain phacelia. This phacelia sends up bluish-purple bloom-spikes, on which the flowers cluster thickly in a panicle, with their golden stamens projecting beyond the petal trumpet giving them a



bewhiskered appearance. The foliage is thick and handsome, and the plant has an odour, though not a pleasant one.

But the real gem of the Arctic summits is the moss campion. This exquisite and gay little pink, its blossoms like innumerable petalled pinheads in a green cushion, braves the loftiest altitudes and caps the most stupendous precipices. It must make fodder for the mountain sheep and goats, and it certainly brings joy to the heart of the climber. Often, under the shelter of a rock, or even in the hollow on top of a rock, you will find a dwarf garden of such dainty charm that you have to kneel beside it and admire. There will be, first, a cushion of moss campion two or three feet across, a pretty swell of soft green velvet covered with the pink blossoms. Then, growing around it, even out of it, will be a plant or two of sky-blue forget-me-not, perhaps some pale mauve Alpine vetch, and, if the altitude is not too great, the slender stalk of the green lily (*zygadenus elegans*), with its many small, roundish, cream-white flowers splashed with green. Indeed, it is not impossible, again if the altitude is not too great, that there will be a shooting star (*dodecatheon pauciflorum*) in the garden—a strange, vivid little red flower spitting down its pointed yellow nose toward the earth again. Certainly, on the surrounding rocks there will be coloured lichens and tiny stonecrop. Such a garden is unknown on the only sub-Arctic summits of the East—the Presi-

dential Range in the White Mountains. And it is worth a trip across the continent to see.

To lift a wild flower out of its setting is sometimes a foolish thing. But yet the more American flowers we can adapt, and as far as possible adapt some of their natural setting with them, into our gardens, the sooner we shall have a garden style of our own. Many of these Rocky Mountain wild flowers can now be secured from western nurseries. They are all perfectly hardy so far as cold is concerned. Heat, rather, would be their danger. Among the best now being exported to the East are the false dandelion (possibly a dangerous experiment); the gay arnica for shady places; the white mariposa lily; the *calypso borealis* (a western lady's slipper); *delphinium bicolor*, or blue-veined larkspur, a low plant for high, dry places; the gay shooting star; the *gaillardia aristata*, or brown-eyed Susan of the prairies and lower hills, possibly too much like our common garden variety to bother with; northern bedstraw, which bears small white clusters of bloom; and blue pentstemon, which is certainly worth experiment. A bed of it, sown to grow up through a ground cover of sweet alyssum, would be extremely lovely. The eastern varieties, called beard tongue, so far as I have ever observed are not thought enough of to put in a garden. You have to visit the Rockies before you appreciate this flower.

Of course, I have mentioned but a tiny proportion of the blossoms that greet you when you enter the magic

wilderness of the Rocky Mountain chain. No doubt each visitor will chide me for omitting his favourite. But if I have made one reader desirous of seeing those gardens for himself, I am satisfied. For all our talk, we haven't yet begun to appreciate our own land. I will match the chalice cup in Grinnell meadow against the edelweiss any day, and give liberal odds at that!

## CHAPTER VII

### THE HARVEST OF THE WILD PLACES

OVER the hill behind our house, and then a mile through the swamp, we come out into a pasture clearing set on a slope. The slope is to the south, with many an undulation and outcropping ledge, with here and there a group of young hemlocks, here and there an old apple tree bristling with suckers, or a spiky seedling from the parent pippin cropped into a dwarf cone like an inverted top; and almost in the centre of the pasture a hollow where a spring makes an emerald patch in the grass, and an emerald ribbon follows the outlet brook into the woods. On its southern edge the clearing meets the forest, with little bays running into the pines, or sallies of young birch coming out to prospect in the sunlight. The pasture grass is cropped by occasional sheep and a cow or two which wander through the woods from a distant farm. They like it especially in hot weather, for its spring and its clumps of hemlock, under which they gather in the dense shade and look out at you blandly. But, despite the cattle, it is a wild spot—an abandoned clearing going back to forest; part of a farm where

man once reaped his hard-won harvests, and now reaps no more.

Yet it is harvested daily by the four-footed and flying creatures of the wilderness, and the human cultivation once expended upon it has made it the richer farm for them. They toil not, neither do they sow, yet they live well on a varied if vegetarian diet. They reap as the fancy strikes them in man's abandoned clearing.

There is so much to see in our pasture, so much to infer! It is so quiet, so delicately melancholy with its suggestion of a vanished race of New England pioneers, so lovely with its woods and spring, such a busy restaurant for the birds by day, with music furnished by the patrons, and by night a restaurant, too, always open, with no police restrictions, though we be not here to see. To take morning reckoning of last night's visitors, especially by their tracks in the snow, is one of the lesser but unfailing delights of woodcraft.

Birds are busy creatures, for all they find so much time to sing, and they pay a great deal more attention to their stomachs than the poets ever mention. You will come closer to the facts in those government bulletins which report the finding of two thousand mosquitoes in the stomach of a single martin, and similar interesting discoveries, than in the poet's pages. I don't know that I have ever seen it computed how many raspberries a catbird can eat, but I know it is more than I can spare from the vines in my own garden, where a



pair of catbirds that nest each year in a red-osier dogwood beneath my study window, love to feed. Out in our abandoned clearing, however, I do not begrudge them the berries, which grow in a corner where the vanished farmer made his last cutting of timber. Many a time I have lain on the ground up the slope in fruiting season and watched a catbird darting back and forth to these vines, as if his appetite were insatiable, his trim gunmetal body taking the sun on head or wing-tip. Presently I would get up and stroll over to gather some berries for myself. You would have thought a band of human pickers had been there, to see all the whitish, thimble-shaped hulls hanging denuded from their stems. Even as I would put out my hand for a red fruit there would come from the thicket close by a mew of protest and an angry flutter of wings. Though, in my own experience, the catbirds are most addicted to raspberries, the thrushes, orioles, robins, flickers, and cedar waxwings also eat them, and doubtless other birds besides.

But there are many other harvest products in and about our pasture besides the raspberries. Even the weeds yield their store, and in Autumn, or better still in Winter, when the weed tops stand up dry and stiff above a light covering of snow, you may see the Canadian or tree sparrows (so called, perhaps, because they spend most of their lives on the ground!) hopping up to peck at the seeds, or occasionally one more wise shaking the seeds down and picking them up from the snow. In

our own farms and gardens, indeed, we may see the same thing occurring, and often beneath a weed top find on light snow the dust of seed shells and innumerable tiny tracks. There is nothing more beautiful than the weed tops above a deep snow by country roadside or forest edge. Consider a group of wild-carrot tops (Queen Anne's lace) dried and turned up into fretted cups to hold each its thimbleful of snow, or a clump of withered golden-rod blooms, as perfect in shape as they were when the frost struck them down, but a brownish gray now instead of gold. Above all, look for the pods of the milkweed, three or more on a single tall stalk, a lovely yellowish brown inside, a delicate mouse-gray on the tongue, which curls over like the hood of a Jack-in-the-pulpit! The milkweed pods, above the deep snows of Winter, with the full sun upon them, are like petrified orchids. Grass tops are lovely, too, rising through the dazzle, and cattails in the swamp, and many a more humble weed. And every one that bears seeds is harvest for the birds and mice, as well as the most delicate of etchings—a few gracefully stiff lines, a puff of withered bloom against the dazzling ground plate of snow. The birds are not the only creatures which benefit by the weeds. Tiny footmarks, with the line of the tail between, make roads amid all the weeds of our pasture after Winter has come. We may call it an abandoned clearing, but it was busy enough last night!

Richer food than the weeds, however, is provided

near our pasture by the black cherry tree close to the old fence just over the ridge toward a desolate cellar-hole. It is the lush time of Summer when this tree is in fruit, the time when the baby birds are getting their growth, when the mother robins are anxiously busy. Man may have forsaken this clearing, but if we take our stand quietly under the cherry tree, and wait a few moments till the frightened birds are reassured, we find ourselves in the midst of almost feverish avian activity. Robins dart into the tree incessantly, making a considerable noise about it, too. Now and then a big flicker comes winging into the branches. There is the gorgeous flash of an oriole, and sometimes, perhaps, the brilliance of a rose-breasted grosbeak or a tanager. Only the robins so haunt our domestic cherry trees (can you not remember how as a boy you were startled, when robbing a neighbour's tree, by the rush of wings almost against your face?); and I have been told that even in an orchard, if a wild cherry is planted amid the cultivated sorts, the red-breasted trespassers will choose it in preference. Perhaps they find the small fruit better for their young. I have seen a mother robin in our garden try twelve successive times to stuff a large red cherry down the throat of her offspring, and give up the task only when the fruit was entirely battered off the stone. The wild cherry trees, of course, are undesirable to the gardener because they harbour so many insect pests, especially tent caterpillars, but if these pests were kept

down by spraying, a few wild trees ought to be a considerable protection on the edge of a cherry orchard.

Along such a fence as that where the cherry tree stands might well be several cedars. The cedar is not a common tree with us, to be sure, but it grows plentifully twenty miles south in Connecticut. There the pastures are studded with dark sentinels, and many an old fence post is companioned by a sturdy tree or two. When the blue cedar berries are ripe in the Autumn the late visitors among the birds, such as cedar wax-wings, robins, jays, and perhaps bluebirds and ruffed grouse (partridges), find them a ready food, and find, as well, warm protection from early snowstorms in the thick foliage. The young cedars, too, make excellent nesting places for the smaller sparrows in early summer. The foliage is so dense and upstanding about the trunk that such a nest is practically invisible, and one existed in our yard last year, only breast-high beside a frequented garden path, for many weeks before we discovered it.

The lively goldfinch is brother to the butterflies in our forsaken pasture in thistle-time. There are but few thistles, and they are clustered amid wild sunflowers in a fork of an old logging road by the edge of the second growth—a pretty colour scheme of pink and gold. It seems almost as if the finches realized their own harmony with this bit of wild gardening, for they wing into the bed, seeking thistle-down for their nests and starting up a swarm of tiny brown butterflies which had been in-

visible before. This garden-patch, too, is murmurous with bees on a warm summer morning. Later the finch returns to the sunflowers for their seeds, and later still you may see the chickadees darting quickly and cheerily out of the pines on the same errand.

Pine buds are still another form of food the pasture affords, and the English pheasants which have overrun our Berkshire woods in the last decade are the feeders. The pheasant is a walking bird, treading with one foot directly behind the other in a perfectly straight line, and he will often tramp for miles without leaving the ground. I have myself tracked one in light snow for more than two miles, and found him at the end in a nest of leaves. Unlike the partridge (perhaps because they are protected fifty-one weeks in the year), the pheasants like to feed in open spaces, and they particularly affect our pasture because many little seedling pines have begun to creep out from the forest edge and climb the slope, especially around the spring. Only the other day, walking softly on snow-shoes, we came out of the woods into the open dazzle and saw four brown pheasants close to the spring, waddling on the snow. They did not fly up till we were within fifty feet of them. The snow was two feet deep, and it had thus raised their feeding level. Their tracks were everywhere about the seedling pines, and the juicy little terminal buds, which had been out of reach before the storm, were nipped off by the hundred. Snow which



made food scarcer for other birds made it easier for them to obtain. Perhaps that is one reason they are multiplying so fast. Many of their tracks led down to the spring, which was still open in the centre—a black hole in the expanse of snow. Evidently they had gone down to drink or bathe.

This same deep snow and accompanying cold brought down to New England and New York from the north flocks upon flocks of the rare pine grosbeaks, large, beautiful birds which move silently save for occasional little soft notes, almost like the pleasant squeaking of a tiny hinge. They grew very tame as winter progressed, and, from a discovery of the wild barberry bushes in the woods and abandoned clearings, moved in to feed upon the barberry hedges lining the drives of summer estates, and then actually to the bushes in front of occupied houses. On one of our walks we found a barberry bush surrounded apparently by blood-stains on the snow, but sitting on a topmost spray was the cause. A young grosbeak, not yet arrived at the dignity of red plumage, his bosom feathers puffed out by the cold wind, held a barberry in his bill, and was working it back and forth, sideways, rolling off the skin, evidently to get at the seeds and pulp. Presently he dropped the skin on the snow, emitted a gentle squeak or two, hopped to a new spray, and, quite unmindful of us, began on another. The snow had no terrors for him so long as that bush held out.

The major harvest of our pasture is undoubtedly the apple crop, and the major harvesters are the deer. The apples are small and bitter—or else tasteless—now. Encouraged by the optimism of Thoreau, I have bitten into many hundreds of wild apples since I first read his immortal pæan in their praise, but I have yet to discover a second Baldwin, or even an equal of the poorest variety in our orchard crop. At any rate, I no longer pick the apples in this pasture. No one picks them. They fall to the ground on an autumn night, and no one hears the soft, startling thud in the silence of the forgotten clearing. But the squirrels and the deer know where they are. More than once, in Autumn, we have come out into the pasture in time to see a squirrel leaping across the open spaces toward the shelter of the pines with an apple in his mouth, and we have often seen one nip an apple from its stem, run down to the ground to get it, and then climb back with it to a crotch and eat at it. Sometimes they spit out the pulp, apparently aiming to get at the seeds, especially after the fruit is over-ripe. Sometimes they appear to swallow it. In old fence-holes frequented by chipmunks and squirrels you will often find apple seeds. On the other hand, you will often find apples partially eaten on the ground beneath the trees, but not bitten through to the core, unmistakably by squirrels. The rabbits, also, eat the apples in winter. They will even come into our garden close to the village street, and

eat the rotten apples on the frozen compost heap. It is there the cat hunts them, stalking behind the hedge. One of the delights of a walk to our pasture is the soft, sneaking approach through the woods, and the surprised uprush of pheasants from the ground when we are discovered, or the sudden appearance of a white tennis-ball, bounding away from under the apple trees. The pips and stalks of wild roses and the new wood of raspberry vines are food for the rabbits, nor are they at all averse to domestic roses and cultivated raspberry stalks, as I know to my sorrow. They are out in almost all weathers, and the alder thicket below the pasture, on the swamp edge, is in winter a perfect network of their regularly travelled roads leading out to the feeding grounds. The dog goes quite mad on this criss cross of trails.

The old apple trees of our clearing, studded with suckers and spikes, are also a favourite roosting place for the pheasants. The pheasants evidently eat the terminal buds. The pine grosbeaks, too, discovered the apple trees last winter, carefully rejecting the skin of the fruit as they did the skin of the berries. Many people, I find, who attempted to attract the grosbeaks around their dwellings discovered that apples were one of the few tempting baits. These birds have not yet learned, like the chickadees and nuthatches, the ways of civilization; they will not touch suet or crumbs—or even sunflower seeds. But apples will tempt them always.

The deer come to the wild apple trees most frequently at night. Wherever there is an abandoned clearing or secluded orchard near their ranges, they will find it out, and in the morning after a snowfall, or more likely the second day after, you will find their hoof-marks all about the trees, and plentiful signs where they have pawed up the snow and nozzled out the frozen fruit beneath. If I were the particular sort of "sportsman" who shoots tame deer in Massachusetts during our open week in November, I know a certain old apple tree far back from the road in a nearly deserted township where I should build a blind and sit comfortably down to wait for the slaughter. But that is hardly the way in which I wish to hunt them. It is almost inconceivable to me, indeed, that the law should give any opportunity for the destruction of these beautiful and harmless creatures, the last of the larger four-footed wild things to roam our eastern woods. Those who hunt them are comparatively few, if damnably destructive; those who would rejoice to see our forests peopled with the loveliest of wild creatures are legion. Yet the kill-lust of the few rules in our legislatures. The traditions of barbarism die hard!

As for me, I much prefer to track the deer back from the apple tree in our clearing, where he has been pawing up the snow, into the woods, following his rambles to see what else he ate that day—not a difficult task when the snow is fresh. It is obvious that he has nibbled at



young hemlocks, apparently pulling off the tips as he passed along, much as a horse will do when you are driving him idly down a country lane. But the ground-hemlock, or American yew, is not thus lightly passed over. When the deer find a clump of this evergreen rising above the snow, they fall upon it eagerly, and sometimes eat it down almost to ground level. It is a staple of their diet. Another staple seems to be sumac. More than once I have come upon a deer along some back road, feeding close to the boundary wall, and investigation has disclosed that he was eating sumac fruit. In winter, when you pick up a deer track in the woods and have time and patience to follow, it will frequently lead you to some sumac hedge by a pasture wall or back road. Before it gets there, to be sure, it may take you into the deep forest for ground-hemlock, and over a frozen swamp to a spot where there are water-holes protected from frost between the peaty hummocks, or even over a mountain almost too steep and slippery for your feet. But ultimately in our New England country the deer will probably swing back toward a sumac patch, even if it brings him close to a village, and leave the signs of his feeding on the broken stems. To start a doe with her fawns by a sumac hedge, to see her clear a stone wall at a single leap with no running start, to see the fawns with white tails like rabbits go cavorting after her with all the grace of animated saw-horses, is one of the prettiest sights in nature.



As you are tracking your deer through the woods, you will come upon many other signs of wild harvesting. Perhaps you may be sitting under a pine tree, when suddenly a cone scale will fall on your head. Listen, and you will hear the sound of crackling far above you. Creep out away from the tree, and look up. It may take you several seconds to find him, but presently you will spot a red squirrel sitting in a crotch, tearing busily at a cone held in his fore paws, to shred it down to the edible part. Perhaps if you are very quiet you may see him descend the trunk, spring out to the ground when he gets three or four feet from the bottom, and leap across the snow toward an old stump, or some other tree which contains his hole. Occasionally, even, he will disappear into the snow, working through a tunnel he has built to some hiding place. There will be scarce a clump in the pine woods without its litter of cone scales on the snow about it, and scarce a tree without tracks leading close to it, and tracks leading away from it which start three, four, or even five feet out. The pine and purple finches feed on the cones, also, as well as the rare pine grosbeaks, and the crossbills. If you ever get a chance to observe a crossbill at work shredding a cone, you will no longer consider his odd bill poorly adapted to its purpose. It never slips, but holds like a vise while the hidden neck muscles under those brick-red feathers do the work. This is the bird which an old German legend says got its twisted bill from trying to pull the

nails from the Saviour's hands when he hung upon the cross, and its red feathers from the sacred blood.

But hark! the dog has flushed a partridge! It goes whirring off through the woods, with its uncanny facility in dodging obstructions. There is little difficulty in finding the spot whence it rose. On a southward-sloping bank, in a shaft of sunlight, the snow has almost melted away, and with a little scratching the bird has uncovered some partridge-berries, or eyeberries as we boys used to call the fruit of the *Mitchella repens*, that dainty little evergreen trailer which bears its fragrant, waxy flowers in June, and later its bright red berries, on the forest floor of our American woods. How glossy the leaves look now, and how brilliant the berries, as they lie on the dark, exposed mould, amid the snow and the scattered fragments of dead leaves scratched away by the bird! They are pleasant to the human taste, also, though without the pungency of checkerberries.

The partridges are growing scarce in our Berkshire thickets. Certain gamekeepers say it is because the English pheasants have driven them to the mountain-tops, but I have my doubts of this, though it is undoubtedly true that this grouse we never tame is now found above the 1,500-foot level, while the pheasants remain at a lower altitude. We have thousands of pheasants and as they were until recently protected the year through, they are extremely fearless, walking up to our

very dooryards after grain. But there is a fatal open season on partridges, and where they are hunted they are shy and scarce. Ascend the Crawford Bridle Path up Mount Washington, however, where they are apparently not molested, and before you break out of the woods on Clinton you will often come upon whole coveys of them beside the path, so tame that they will almost let you touch them with your hand, as they will in the Canadian wilds. I have stood in the path and watched a male bird, with three or four females about him, scratching in the moss not six feet from me, and have talked aloud with my companion while the partridges continued feeding, quite indifferent to us, and keeping up a soft, hen-like *coot, coot* of their own, a lovely little woodland sound.

The fact that the English pheasants are not necessarily inimical to partridges, at any rate, is attested by the experience of a breeder in Lenox, who found both birds nesting on terms of perfect peace in the thickets of his carefully posted and patrolled estate. He has several times tried to breed the grouse in captivity, but with little success, owing to the strange fact that the cock invariably attempted to kill the female after union, and on seven occasions succeeded before the keeper could rescue her. But in a wild state, this breeder believes, the partridges could hold their own with the pheasants if given the same protection. What a pity the chance, at least, is not afforded them! No

surprise in the woods is more startlingly sudden and nerve-tingling than the uprush of an unsuspected partridge and his booming flight along an alley of sunlight ahead. Why must it forever be a temptation to pull a trigger? Alas! man has got but little beyond the instincts of his remote ancestors!

The partridge feeds on strawberries, as well as on the berry which bears his name, on checkerberries, false Solomon's seal, apple buds, pine buds, and even on wild grapes. Sometimes the grouse will sit in a tall tree almost like hens at roost, and perhaps you may see them in the early morning, or late twilight after frosts. They are more at ease than hens, however, and negotiate a change of perch with far more grace and much less audible excitement.

We have no quail in Berkshire County, which is one of our serious failings. When I was a boy in eastern Massachusetts, a half-witted French Canadian was often my companion in the open, because he could sit down in a field by the edge of the woods, motion me to silence, and then whistle "Bob White" till sometimes a whole flock of quail would be gathered on the ground about us, almost like the penguins about Captain Scott's phonograph on the Ross Barrier. I can still remember the odd thrill of that experience, and my awe of the half-witted youth who had so little kinship with the rest of us boys, so much with the birds. But our Berkshire winters are too severe for the ground-dwelling quail, and



we have too many foxes, as well—and doubtless, in times past, have had too many hunters.

Foxes are not generally accredited with vegetarian instincts. You never see their tracks, as you see those of the rabbits, around a young oak-tree shoot which has been nibbled down to the tough stem. But Æsop evidently thought otherwise when he wrote his fable of the sour grapes, and there is plenty of testimony that Æsop was right. Foxes do eat wild grapes, as many observers have testified, climbing a considerable way to get them; and probably at times they eat berries and perhaps apples. I have found their tracks, at any rate, beneath apple trees. I have also been confidently assured that they eat the persimmons in Virginia; that the “ol’ houn’ dawgs” know how good this fruit is, too, and if you wish to find the very best tree, take a “dawg” with you.

Mr. Woodchuck, on the other hand, doesn’t eat at all after September. He hibernates, coming out on Candlemas Day to see his shadow and make an annual “weather story” for the newspapers. Up in our pasture one Winter the ground-hog who lives there had to tunnel up through two feet of snow to get his outlook. The six-inch bore by which he emerged was yellowed by the dirt on his body, and he packed a hard, dirty track across the snow for ten feet to a bore leading down to the back entrance of his dwelling. Evidently he took some exercise between the two doors. But there was not a single track leading away in any direction.



The wood-mice—or deer-mice—eat apples, surely, and many other things, including maple seeds. They also harvest hazel and beech nuts in great quantities, and they are not at all averse, as I can unfortunately testify, to Spanish iris bulbs and the bark of young apple trees. They nest not only in the woods, but in our gardens, preferably under a pile of pea brush, or the straw protection on the flower beds, and often I have found their tracks in the snow all about the weed stalks, and the dust of trampled seeds, as if they had shaken down their food by climbing the stems.

The mention of maple seeds brings us around, by a process of suggestion plain enough to the Yankee, to Spring. When the sap runs in the maple trees, when the melting snow steams in the sugar grove and makes a haze that is permeated with the aroma of wood-smoke and boiling syrup, Spring indeed is on the way. It is then that the yellow-bellied woodpecker, or sapsucker, comes into prominence, if not into repute. He makes one or two holes in a tree—deep holes, sufficient to induce a good run of sap—and then goes to another tree, and another, and still another. When his taps are all running, he starts back and makes the rounds, drinking insatiably, and also, some say, feeding on the insects which stick to the wet bark around his bores. Mr. Burroughs denies this, and on the occasions when I have driven a bird away from his bores I have never yet found anything but clean sap and bark in the hole.

He taps the yellow birches, also, for they have a very considerable flow of sap in Spring, which, in an un-boiled state, tastes nearly as sweet as maple. Later he favours apple trees.

The squirrels, likewise, are sap-drinkers at this season. If you will break the twig of a sugar maple in Spring you will soon find a crystal drop depending from the abrasion. The squirrels know this, and they either nip several twigs off or bite deeply into the larger shoots, and then go back over their tracks, drinking the sweet sap drops. I have seen them do it in the maple at my own door, as well as in the woods.

Our investigation of that deer's diet has taken us far afield from our abandoned pasture, over the snow, through the woods, even into our own gardens. Let us return once more to the sunny slope where the stray sheep wander and the finches dart and dip above the nodding thistle-tops. The small wild apples are already forming in the trees, for future harvest. The little trickle of water which runs away from the spring over a ribbon of emerald grass into the woods, tempts our feet for another brief excursion, till we stand on the edge of a swamp and see amid the weeds the winding canals of the muskrats, where they swim in their search for lily-roots. As we retrace our steps a squirrel chatters at us amid the pines, and when, a moment later, we break into the clearing once more, a startled cock pheasant rises from his feeding and skims away, his

long tail-feathers streaming out behind like the rudder of a monoplane. The summer afternoon is very still, yet a hundred sounds are audible—the chime of crickets, the hum of bees, the croak of a frog in the spring, the sweet cheeps and liquid songs of the birds, the murmur of a lazy wind in the pines. How delicate, how peaceful, these sounds are! How unprovocative of tiring thought or senseless worry is this pasture solitude! Here the beasts of the wood and birds of the air find nourishment and go happily about their woodland harvesting. The declining sun bathes all the slope in “the golden light of afternoon,” and pushes its beams down the forest aisles to play tag with the shadows. We lie quiet beside the spring, and see a rabbit hop across one of these aisles, his tail flashing white, and make for the shelter of a young pine thicket. A catbird mews by the raspberries. Out of the deep wood rings the elfin clarion of a thrush. It is a little world of little creatures, toiling happily for their bread; and yet the soul feels for them all a curious kinship, here in this silent pasture where the shadows lengthen and the rising sea-surf murmurs in the pines. To shoot the least and smallest would be to break with murderous hands the bonds which link Nature into unity. The drumming partridge, the thrush which in shadowed thicket sounds his liquid call, the poet with his verse—how much of star-dust is in each? It is only the rash man who attempts the answer with a gun.

## CHAPTER VIII

### NEIGHBOURS OF THE WINTER NIGHT

A BELATED snow had fallen, the glass went down ten degrees and sleigh-bells again jingled. It was the last Parthian shot of the retreating Winter. Three days before I had been working in the garden spading out my cold-frames, while the song-sparrows and robins were heralding the Spring. This unexpected return of Winter drove the poor sparrows in close for refuge. Two of them found shelter in the woodshed. Going out on the porch the morning after the storm, I saw innumerable bird tracks in the sifted snow-powder on the floor—hop, hop, hop, everywhere. A pound of suet had been completely devoured in twenty-four hours. I went down in the garden to look for the rabbit which has visited there all winter. He had been across the snow for his breakfast before I was up, jumping steadily and straight for the lettuce bed, his small fore feet coming down first and his long hind feet swinging on either side and coming down a couple of inches ahead. The frost caught a good deal of young lettuce in the Fall, and the snow has kept it in cold storage for him. He doesn't live in our garden,

though, but merely feeds there. He lives two lots away, in a pile of straw round a rambler rose-bush. Our dogs often try to catch him, but he is too clever. The other day, before this spring snowfall, I was in the garden with the dogs. We saw nothing. Hickey, however, picked up a scent and began following it over the brown soil. Suddenly, under the terrier's nose, the dead, brown lump of a cauliflower plant came to life and began to jump. The dogs were after it, in full cry. Br'er Rabbit doubled and gained a few steps, but the dogs closed on him. Again he doubled, and this time made for a sheet of ice in the shadow behind the house. The instant his feet struck this ice he doubled again. The dogs slid ten feet, helplessly. This gave him the time he needed. He disappeared under the fence, like a vanishing ball of white worsted, and left the dogs baying their rage.

Our house is on the main street of a populous village in the Berkshires, yet this rabbit has left his tracks in the snow this Winter clear out to the front sidewalk. He is a wild rabbit, too, not an escaped pet. After the snow came in the Autumn, in addition to his track and, of course, the innumerable tracks of squirrels under the evergreens and of snowbirds around the crumb tray at the back door, I used to find record in the morning of unexpected night visitors. A skunk tracked several times up from the swamp behind to the garbage pail. Some years ago a wealthy resident of our hills stocked



his game preserve with English pheasants, which have now spread over the county. The pheasant is a walker. You cannot mistake his tracks, for he puts one foot neatly down directly in front of the other, making a clean impression, as if he had picked it up again very carefully. One morning I found close to the house the end of a pheasant's trail. Something had evidently scared him and he had risen from the ground, brushing the snow on both sides with the first flap of his wings. Curious to see how far he had walked, I put on my pedometer and followed that trail. It led me through my little swamp, up the hill through a neighbour's yard, across the road, through a spruce hedge, across the great lawn of a big summer estate, into the woods behind. I put on my snow-shoes in the woods and kept on. The trail finally ceased in a brush-heap, where the snow was tracked all about and in one place scratched through to the brown leaves. That pheasant had walked exactly one mile and a quarter—a long walk for a bird! And in all that distance there was no sign that he had stopped to scratch for food. It was as if he had set out deliberately to walk to my house. I could not flatter myself that such was the case; doubtless some sense of his had told him it was useless to scratch, or perhaps he had fed from the bushes through which he had walked. But his trail was without a break.

My collie tracks like a fox, making, that is, but two marks instead of four. But of course his stride is

longer and his feet are much larger, with a deeper impress, for he weighs three times as much as a fox. There was no mistaking, then, one morning after a fresh, light snowfall, the trail of a fox across the garden. We have no chickens, and I was surprised that he had crossed our lot, till I followed the trail. He had come up on the ice of the sluggish, sunken brook behind, thus being concealed by the high banks, had turned out in my backyard and followed the shelter of the fence up to the garden, crossed that, gone through the fence on the other side, and drawn near a chicken-coop. But something had then frightened him—the bark of a dog perhaps—for his tracks suddenly swerved, turned from a lope to a gallop, and he streaked for the sunken brook again. Once there, he had settled down to his old pace and gone on his way.

On this same brook I have occasionally found the track of a mink, coming up, no doubt, from the more secluded river to reach the chicken-and-duck farm near the source. The mink, when he is taking it easy and the snow is deep and soft, makes paw tracks on either side of a line drawn by his tail. He is a crafty animal, and we have but one boy in town who can trap him. My wife, not usually bloodthirsty, looked sadly at those tracks in our backyard. “To think of mink going right past our house,” she sighed, “and my old furs so shabby!” Woman’s tenderness curiously breaks down at certain points.

We have had weasels in the yard, too, though I have never seen one there. The weasel is a land mink, or, rather, the mink is a water weasel. A song of my boyhood used to affirm that "Pop goes the weasel." From his tracks it is certain that he goes hop. He never seems to walk, like his brother the mink, who has his leisure moments, but always to leap, landing with feet bunched, and rising almost from two tracks, side by side, almost an inch apart, instead of the usual four of a squirrel. The tracks in my yard showed that the weasel was clearing a little more than a foot at a bound. He came up to investigate a pile of dead apple-tree trimmings, and jumped all around the pile. Then, evidently finding nothing he wanted, he made off again. But when a weasel is badly frightened he has the leaping ability of a flea, and will clear sometimes as much as ten feet.

Let us follow the weasel out of the yard into the wilder countryside. He likes to live in pine stumps or by old stone walls, and he is an eager, savage little hunter. Sometimes you may find in the snow his leaping trail closing in with that of a cottontail, and then the marks of blood. Sometimes, perhaps, you may be rewarded by a sight of the weasel himself, his beady, slightly bulging black eyes looking intently straight ahead over the black tip of his nose. His back is brownish and his tail-tip is black, but the rest of him is so white that he seems two black eyes set in white, as preternaturally

alert as his body—a wild and beautiful little animal on the snow.

It is a clear, crisp morning when you set out. There was a snowfall the day before yesterday—not yesterday, because animals usually remain in their holes several hours after a storm. The countryside is spangled white. The rusty tamaracks in the swamps, the tawny roadside willows, the delicate lilac of the bare blackberry vines, give a note of subdued but rich colour to the landscape. From the village behind, wood-smoke rises in the still air. Ahead, you see the slender second-growth trees up the mountains like a delicate cross-hatching made with gray crayon on a white ground. The world is lovely, but not wild. Winter is in her best mood. Not a mile from home you enter the still woods, where there is no sign of life save for an occasional squirrel or chickadee, but where, through a break in the trees or over the wall where the weasel lives, you can still see the village spire. What wild things passed through here last night? None, surely, for the high-school sleigh-ride party went shouting by on the road. But let us look at the telltale snow and see.

Here is a little clearing, a small meadow or forest lawn, no doubt. The snow by the border is all crossed and recrossed with a delicate, lacy design, made by tiny feet. See, between the prints often trails a line. This little four-footed creature had a tail. But why do the tracks here cover the snow like lacework? There was a

moon last night. That was why the high school went on a sleigh-ride, and why the deer-mice danced! Had you been hidden at the edge of this bit of moon-blached open, you might have seen them, like tiny sprites, or like dead, curled-up russet-brown oak leaves wind-blown over the snow, with their tails for stems. Follow one of the tracks back from the open. It leads to a rotten old stump. Inside, somewhere, the mouse is sleeping.

We have passed Mr. Weasel's wall, and the spot where the deer-mice danced. Keeping our eyes to the ground, we see innumerable squirrel tracks, groups of four prints, sometimes three feet apart when the squirrel took a long bound, and every now and again they disappear into a round hole in the snow. Usually there is a second hole a few feet farther on. The squirrel came up again probably with a cone. Follow his track, and it will lead to the base of a tree or an old stump, and there you will find fresh bits of the cone—crumbs from his table. You will find tracks of partridges, too, and places where they have scratched the snow on a southern bank till the fresh green of the partridge-berry vines gleams through, and perhaps a red berry or two, overlooked by the bird. Squirrels and partridges, to be sure, are day neighbours rather than night, but you may be certain they were up earlier than we were.

The woods are getting a little wilder now. We come upon an open place where the snow is trodden down by large animals. In the centre are the remnants of a



ground-hemlock (or "snake bush," as we call it in Massachusetts)—the *Taxus Canadensis*. It is eaten down to the last leaf, as close to the snow as if a scythe had been swept over it. The snow is covered with the unmistakable hoof-prints of deer. These tracks are fresh. The deer were here last night, two of them at least, for two tracks lead off to the west, the larger one trailing the hind feet a trifle, in snow more than six inches deep, showing it to be made by a buck. The doe picks her feet up cleaner. She is the high stepper of the family. She also toes straight ahead, while the buck toes out a trifle, a reversal of the typical human couple.

Now there is a break in the woods, for we are in populous New England. We come into cleared land, into a farm. An old orchard, much neglected, runs along behind a stone wall close to the road. As we come down through this orchard we again find deer tracks, quantities of them. There is every indication that the deer were here last night pawing up the snow under the gnarled old trees for the frozen windfalls on the ground below. Bits of frozen rotten apples are left here and there to tell the tale. Last night, while the farmer was sleeping, or even, perhaps, while there was still a light in his window, the deer came into his orchard to feed, and one of them, when a horse stamped in the stable, raised his head and stood a shadowy, beautiful statue of eternal vigilance.

Crossing the road and the pasture, we shall find yet

more deer tracks by the sumac bushes before we enter the woods again. Ground-hemlock, old apples, and sumac berries seem to be the favourite winter food of the New England deer. They are also fond of lettuce in season—a farmer in Connecticut told me last summer they came into his kitchen garden, not fifty feet from the house, and ate up a whole row of lettuce one night, without touching anything else or even trampling anything down. Once more in the woods, the ground grows broken, rising toward the rocks at the base of the mountain. Here we begin to look for the tracks of the fox. But first we come upon cottontail tracks, centring, in our northern woods, around white-oak shoots which are often nibbled down to the snow. Farther south the rabbit eats dogwood shoots. A friend of mine once watched a rabbit feeding close to a young hedge. A red Irish terrier came by, within a few feet. The rabbit, which had just bitten off a shoot six inches long, stopped eating, the shoot still in his mouth, and shrank into an excellent imitation of a lump of earth. The dog passed by within eight feet without seeing him, came back again on the scent, sniffed around, and finally disappeared. Meanwhile the rabbit never moved a muscle. When the dog had finally gone, the rabbit went on absorbing the shoot, end foremost, as calmly as if his life had never been in peril. So our rabbit here, by the white-oak twig in the woods, might have done had a fox come by.

But here is a track like the rabbit's, only larger, with the hind feet leaving four distinct toe marks, and nearly four and one-half inches long. It is the track of a varying hare, or snow-shoe rabbit, a breed once common in New England but now growing more and more rare. He changes to white in winter, unlike the cottontail. I once saw one cross a field in a mild December, the most conspicuous thing in the landscape. Poor fellow, he was protectively coloured for snow, and the weather man had disappointed him. He is so rare in our country now that to find his track in the woods or swamps is something of an adventure, almost like finding (as we did last winter, only a mile from home) the paw marks of a wildcat. Now at last we pick up the track of a fox.

It was one January morning, in the foxes' mating season, that the following drama was disclosed to us in the snow. The stage was set with snow and rocks and young second-growth timber, not three hundred yards back from a farmhouse and a country road, but close to the mountain. We came first on the tracks of the heroine, which were unmistakable. She was walking, making apparently but two paw marks in a line. Suddenly she began to gallop. After a few rods another galloping track joined with hers and paralleled it. We followed this second track back a way. The hero had been bounding, too, but only for a short distance. Beyond that he had been walking. Slinking through the night, he had heard the call of the mating season, and

had suddenly rushed to meet his fate. We went back to the spot where the two converging tracks met, and followed them. They ran parallel for a time, and then there were signs in the snow that the heroine had grown less coy, had paused and permitted the approach of her mate. From this point the dual tracks radiated in several directions, showing less signs of haste, came back again, and finally made off zigzagging through the timber, toward a ledge of rocks no doubt suggested by one or the other as a home possibility. The rocks gained, the tracks led straight to a freshly dug hole under a crack in the ledge. There was even fresh earth pawed up on the snow. No tracks led away. It was the night before that the drama had been enacted, and in their newly built home the couple were already established. We left them in peace, with the delicacy due to honeymooners.

It is seldom, to be sure, that you will find so perfect a snow record as that of the actions of your night neighbours in the woods, yet a little watchfulness on the winter walk will disclose much about those wild folk that will give a basis for reconstructing their habits, till your imagination can people the still, snowy places, from the mountain-top even to your front door, with mysterious inhabitants of the dark. The pleasure of picking up a trail behind the house and running it back into the woods for two or three miles is not lightly to be dismissed. Sometimes my visitors from town look with a

supercilious tolerance upon this sport. They even suggest that it very closely resembles the sport of dogs, who tear madly through the woods on a scent, or the hare-and-hound chases of boys, who track one another through the snow. Of course they are right. It does closely resemble the sport of dog and boy. That is one of its charms.

But it has another charm, which they do not realize until they, too, have indulged in it, properly clad and properly led. It brings us as no mere aimless walking can, nor any hunting expedition with rifle or shotgun, into intimate touch with the life of Nature, and gives a new interest, an almost human neighbourly note, to the woods and fields which border our dwellings.

My wife and I went for a tramp a day or two after the belated snow-storm I spoke of. The world was still white, but Spring was curiously in the air again, and behind the hemlock hedge of a deserted formal garden on a summer estate two song-sparrows were singing a duet. We walked up the hill behind a neighbouring farm, and came upon the track of a woodchuck. Spring had tempted him out of his winter quarters (he came out, of course, on Candlemas Day, but ducked back again this year), and he had crossed the pasture rather aimlessly, evidently wondering whether this snow meant that he should go back to sleep or not. He toed in more than most of his kind—a comical trail. At the next fence was the track of a fox. It kept within three



feet of the fence all the way down to the inclosed winter cow pasture behind the barns, and was there lost in the trample of cattle-prints. But back toward the wooded hill it was distinct enough. We followed it. After the sly manner of his kind, the fox had kept close to what cover a rail fence provided, all the way across the pasture. Once or twice he had stopped to listen, planting an extra paw mark.

When we entered the woods we found that the trail came down from the summit of a steep, rocky hill which is part of a town park, but preserved in its native wildness. The side of this hill is thickly sprinkled with laurel bushes. Slipping and falling in the deep, soft snow, we scrambled up the rocky slope on the trail. The fox had not abandoned his cunning even in the deep woods. He had so zigzagged down the hill that he had been almost constantly protected by laurel bushes. There was a young moon last night, and we could imagine him slinking down under the projecting waxy leaves toward that delectable duck yard on the distant farm. At the top of the hill we hoped to find his nest among the piles of broken boulders, but when we reached the summit a great wind-blown ledge had melted bare. Across this he had evidently walked, but we could find no sign of the trail on the other side. The sun had probably melted it out. We had to abandon the chase.

Instead, still panting with the slippery climb, we

looked off over the dazzling, snowy world, over our beautiful valley with its red and white houses, its steeples and winding river, to the bounding ring of amethyst hills. Last night that same scene had slept under the moon, and out on this ledge had come the little red form of a fox and sniffed the wind, and then, slipping like a shadow into the cover of the laurels, had sneaked down the slope. No one saw him. No one ever sees him, though this rock is in a town park. Yet he lives here. He is our neighbour in the night, and takes possession of his own while we slumber. There was the proof of it on the snow at our feet.

In Massachusetts there is a week in November when it is permissible to shoot deer. As rifles are not allowed, however, our brave hunters go out with shotguns loaded with buckshot, and later attract the admiring attention of the village by driving through with a poor deer's head lolling over the tailboard—perhaps. That open week in November probably explained our lame buck. When we first saw his tracks he was trailing his right hind leg badly; he was stopping frequently to lie down, every hundred feet at first, and where he rested there would be traces of blood. He was one of a small herd. Week after week we came across records of this herd—ground-hemlock eaten down to the snow, trampled sumac bushes, old orchards pawed up, and hoof-prints tracking through the deep snow of the woods. And always the right hind leg of the buck was dragged.

Once a farmer up the road saw him limping at early morning through a pasture. But the blood stains disappeared after a short time, and gradually the leg trailed less. He was evidently getting well.

We soon came to take a personal interest in the fortunes of that buck. Every few days we would go where we thought the herd might have fed and look for his trail. Fortunately the snow stayed on the ground without melting, with several new falls, for more than two months, and the herd, too, remained in the neighbourhood. We were able to convince ourselves that the old buck was finally almost as good as new, though he still trailed that right hoof a trifle more than the left, and did not tread up so close to the fore leg with it as with the other. About the first of March a party of trampers startled the herd in the woods. The deer, six of them, in full view, made a break for a swamp, and from that day we saw no more fresh deer tracks. It is curious how close they had come to our houses, even feeding by night in our very orchards, and yet how easily they were frightened away. I never got a glimpse of them myself, though I saw their tracks almost daily. Yet by this sport of tracking alone I was able to follow them through the woods and to live a little their wild life. The record of their night prowlings gave a new charm and wildness to our fields and forests.

There is one more track I shall look for in the timber on Rattlesnake Hill before the snow is quite gone. It is

the most curious and interesting track of all, exactly like the print of a tiny baby's shrivelled foot. Mr. Coon hibernates, of course, but Spring is in the air long before the snow melts in the mountain woods, and he often comes forth in time to leave his quaint footprints on the remnants of a drift. Coon-hunts at night, with dogs, lanterns, and guns, are sometimes exciting and always exhausting, but they never yield me quite the satisfaction of finding that little snow-print record not two miles from my home, of searching in muddy spots near by for further tracks, of living in fancy the scene of the night before—the still, dark woods, just budding with Spring, the sleepy boom of the hours from the distant steeple in the village, the sharp-nosed little face emerging from a rotten tree trunk, then the scramble down, with the soft thud, perhaps, of a piece of dislodged bark, and the midnight hunting.

Even our tamest woods and fields, even our own suburban backyards, shelter their wild life. We have neighbours in the night, though we know it not. They leave their records behind them in the snow for seeing eyes, and to read those records aright is to read a little deeper into the book of Nature. The man who goes to walk with his nose to the snow is sometimes thought a crank, sometimes a bore. Perhaps he is both. But you can never make him believe it; or, we might better say, you cannot make him care if he is! It is not you but his wild neighbours he is thinking of.

## CHAPTER IX

### STONE WALLS

MY GRANDFATHER was a man of great physical prowess. When I was a little chap he used to sit me on the palm of his hand and hold me out at arm's length; and at a slightly later period he would regale me with sagas of his mighty deeds. One of these deeds, I well remember, was the erection of a long stone wall. For some reason, this wall had to be constructed in as short a time as possible, and Grandfather built so much the first day that it took him two days to walk back to the starting point! Grandfather was a Yankee, and so was I. He knew that I knew that such a feat was impossible, and I knew that he knew that I knew. This made us great friends. And yet I half believed him! Besides, he once took me to a piece of that very wall, and challenged me to doubt his story then. It was a long walk, consuming the better part of an afternoon. Though we stopped a while on Huckleberry Hill to get our mouths black with the delicious fruit, which is never sold in the city markets (no, they are *not* huckleberries, they are various sorts of blueberries, which are quite different, botanically and gastronom-



ically). After we left Huckleberry Hill we crossed a meadow and entered the woods, following a dim cart track for a long way, till we suddenly came upon the mossy ruins of a stone wall, in the heart of the scrub timber.

"There!" exclaimed my grandfather. "There she is! You see, the wall must have come from a long way off to get here."

"But why did you build a wall through the woods?" I asked.

"There were no woods here when this wall was built," Grandfather answered—and I knew that he was telling me the truth now, for the funny little squint had gone out of his blue eyes. "My father kept sheep, hundreds and hundreds of sheep, and this was part of their grazing land. Why, my mother used to weave my clothes herself, and they were warmer than the ones you buy in Boston, I can tell you!"

"What became of the sheep?" said I, "and have all these woods grown up since you were a boy? And how did your mother—she was my great-grandmother, wasn't she?—weave clothes? And did you use to help shear the sheep? And——"

"Yes—and no," my grandfather laughed. "The woods have all grown up since I was a young man, and the sheep have all made chops for little boys to eat, and nobody remembers how to make cloth any more."

"Why?" I asked.

It seems to me I can still recall the curious look on my grandfather's face, as he answered, quite unconscious of Tennyson, "The old ways change. They make cloth in big factories now, and raise sheep by the hundred thousand out West. That old wall is to me a kind of monument."

His words, of course, had little meaning to my childish mind, but his manner curiously impressed me, and I stood silent beside him and looked at the mossy, ruined wall, which ran over ridges and dipped into hollows till it was lost to view in the gloom of the chestnuts and maples. But his words have come back to me since, many and many a time, in my wanderings about New England, and to me, too, an old stone wall suddenly discovered in the heart of the woods is a melancholy monument to the ancient régime, to a vanished order—a boundary line which once marked a clearing, invaded now and recaptured by the forest. The corollary of the old wall in the woods is the increased population of our cities, it is factories and congested industry. It is something curiously and harshly at variance with the immediate scene—the mottled shadows of the woods, the throb of a thrush, the swaying stems of the Solomon's seal, the chatter of a squirrel running along the green and gray stones and leaping up a trunk which has pushed a whole section of the wall down into a loose heap.

New England is a land of stone walls (stone fences,

visitors from alien regions sometimes call them, as they call our doughnuts crullers); and it often seems to me as if my earliest recollections of natural scenes were invariably circumscribed by a line of piled gray field-stone—circumscribed but not imprisoned, for always I could climb the wall and look forth over the field beyond to the next one. “Stone walls do not a prison make,” except for silly cows. But how they rib and pattern our rolling, hilly New England, over dome and dale, in sun and shower, lines of the landscape as immutable now as the hills themselves! Every field must be cleared of stones for tillage, and the easiest way to dispose of the stones is to build a wall with them. And how many stones there are! A certain lecturer in Boston used to have a story which never failed to arouse his audience. He was travelling in New Hampshire, he said, and came upon a farmer in a field, with a derrick rigged up over two bowlders parted by a narrow cleft.

“What are you doing?” he asked the farmer.

“Wall, there’s a blade o’ grass down in that gol dern cleft,” the farmer replied, “and I gotter git it up before my keow starves.”

“Such is farming in New Hampshire,” said this lecturer, thereby proving the hardihood and courage of the New England pioneers.

From the summit of any of our hills, you see New England as a crazy quilt. Our fields are not laid out

on the gridiron plan, like the farms of Illinois. Nature was their original architect, and man has followed her design. It was always easiest to roll the stones cleared from field or pasture into the first hollow, so that we have achieved over and over again not only a charming irregularity of pattern, but that most beautiful of single effects, the domed field, where zebra stripes curve up against the sky when the first snow scud fills the autumn furrows, and in lush midsummer wave after billowing wave of rye ripple down on the wind against the breakwater of the gray stone wall.

Ascend any considerable hill in cultivated New England, whether it be in Thoreau's haunts through Middlesex or Monument Mountain in the Berkshires, which Hawthorne and Herman Melville climbed together and which Bryant celebrated in his verse, and you will see the crazy-quilt pattern of fields and pastures spread out below you, stitched with stone walls. Golden grain and brown stubble, green pasture and tasselled corn, neglected fields of yellow "hardhack," acres where the cows crop and wander amid the great pink laurel shrubs—no matter what the season, there is always infinite variety of colour and texture in the different patches of the quilt, always an infinite variety in their shape, determined by the contours of the land; and always the stone walls stitch the patches together, the quilt is sewn with gray and green—green because every wall is bordered with shrubs and wild flowers. In a hilly

country one does not need an aëroplane to show him the pattern of the land. He may, by ascending any summit, see the world as the birds see it. The ideal way to teach a child the use of maps would be to take him up on a hilltop above his native village. There is a living map below him, with his father's boundaries marked in stone.

We have all heard of the hedgerows of old England. They have been so celebrated by the poets that even those of us who have never walked in English lanes seem to know them familiarly. But who will sing the hedgerows of New England, which have grown up everywhere along stone walls and fences between our homestead farms or divided fields? Our bird-sown hedgerows are to the hedges of England what the wild garden is to the formal border, and all the charm and shy surprises of the wild garden are theirs. Neglected by "sightseers," never given a thought by the farmers themselves, uncelebrated and unsung, they march in feathery beauty between a thousand fields, up hill and down, bright at their base with mulleins and milkweed, with roses and golden-rod, harbouring chipmunks within the old wall which is their spine, and white-throats fluting in their branches. Birches and maples, poplars and dark cedars, now and then a chestnut, alders in the hollows where the wall dips to a brook, choke-cherries where the robins scold, aspens trembling to the wandering winds of June, hazel bushes and dog-



wood—the variety is endless. Even a pine, sometimes, will crown an eminence, its great limbs unrestricted by surrounding forest, stretching out in crabbed horizontals like a cedar of Lebanon, a monarch of the pasture. These hedgerows are utterly artless. Because neither the plough nor the mower can go quite to the wall, long ago a fringe of weeds and small shrubs pushed out a foot or two on either side, even in pastures cropped by cattle; and once this protecting base of shrubs was established the birds and mice and squirrels, even the courier wind bearing maple seeds and poplar down, could begin successfully to plant their garden. As the years passed, and the trees grew taller and stronger, the sumac pushed out suckers into the field, the wild flowers massed more solidly amid the shrubbery, often the hedgerow would invade the clearing for ten feet on either side of the wall, and the farmer would have to attack it, trimming it back to the best and strongest trees. If you will examine one of these old hedges to-day you will often find, when you have penetrated through the tangle of shrubs and tall mulleins and golden-rod into its heart, that the original wall has fallen and become half buried. Perhaps on top of it a rough rail fence has later been erected, which now also has gone to ruin, while as the latest barrier to prevent an ambitious cow from squeezing through into the corn a barbed wire has been strung along the trees—natural fence posts which will not

decay. No English hedgerow holds such a record of successive generations, from the first clearing of the fields and the erection of the boundary wall.

And what a good time the dog has in our native hedges! As we go out across the fields of a summer afternoon, he bounds along beside us, picking up a woodchuck scent or startled into sheepish stillness by the sudden uprush of a meadow lark, but keeping pretty close until we reach the long hedgerow which separates a twenty-acre slope of mowing from a fifteen-acre abandoned pasture, and which marches between them up the steep hill to the woods where a sentinel chestnut marks the trail to the mountain-top. This hedgerow is chiefly of maple, though there are aspens in it, and chestnut, and cherry and alder. It is feathery as a Corot in the level light of afternoon, and it twinkles in the clear June breeze. It is ten or fifteen feet thick at the base, almost completely concealing the original stone wall and the later rail fence, while the heave of the tree roots and the accumulation of compost has raised the ground level beneath it so that if it were suddenly cut down the two fields would be separated by a considerable mound. When we reach this hedgerow, where the Peabodies are always fluting in early summer, the dog abandons us. The hedge holds secrets for him which we can only guess. We see his hind quarters and his tail disappear into the tangle, and hear within the crash of bushes, the grunts and pawings of a canine

on the hunt. He has forgotten us in the joy of this cover, and we walk on beside the hedge, savouring its wild border of flowers and hearing the rustle of its leaves, till we enter the woods beyond, and presently the dog rejoins us, subdued and domestic again, and pokes an earthy muzzle into our hands.

In Winter the New England hedgerow, stripped of its undergrowth of weeds and wild flowers, shows more plainly its naked spine of wall, and how interesting a thing it is to follow when the snow is on the ground, for it seems to be both haven and highway for innumerable little creatures of the field and forest. The tracks of weasels and squirrels lead into it; the rabbits often beat down a hard little path beside it, a regular travelled road between feeding grounds; the deer come to it for the sumac; the juncos and other winter birds perch upon it, or in the trees of the hedge, and flutter down to feed on the weed seeds below. How permanent the wall looks, too, rising gray and a little grim above the snow, like an infantry trench imposed against the charge of the cohorts of the snow and storm. Against the northern face the charge has piled itself till it reaches the top of the wall, but in vain—it has gone no farther. Defeat is written in the northward sloping drift, which packs down harder and harder as Winter advances. On the face of the open country those drifts are the last to disappear in Spring. We walk through the soggy fields late in March and see them everywhere, grown a little

dingy with dust and dead leaves, but flecking the landscape as if some Titanic artist had spattered the world with a brush full of china white. They slowly recede into the shadow of the walls, and suddenly on a morning in April, when the song-sparrows are singing and the sun is hot on your neck, they are gone, vanished in the night, even the long white streak across the highest upland pasture. Then we know that Spring has come indeed.

The old walls or fences which divide a country highway from the bounding fields are always alluring—almost as alluring as the bars which occasionally break their line and invite the vagrant wayfarer to explore down a lane to the river or up a wood road into the green dimness of the hills. To the lover of gardens they are alluring for the perfect background they always make to the wild garden of the roadside. Even in Winter, a gray stone wall rising above the snow, with the lavender stalks of blackberry vines against it, is a lovely thing. When it peeps between pink roses in June, or wild sunflowers in early August or golden-rod and asters in September, here a round gray stone, there a pinnacle of quartz, again a gap, perhaps, to show a tiny vista of the fields beyond, it is the gardener's envy and despair. Nor is the roadside fence much less effective, for over it the clematis scrambles as upon a trellis, and the bitter-sweet vines twine till they can find a tree to climb and hang out their red berries against the coming Winter.

The split rail, or Virginia fence, is a relic of a happy day when we could afford to be prodigal with lumber—or thought we could. It was never common in New England, though not unknown. I well recall one where the quail nested in the corners, and every alternate triangle of the snake line was a mass of blackcap raspberries. The whip-poor-wills used to sing upon it, too, in the summer evenings—a melancholy song which always affected me with that indefinable *Weltschmerz* peculiar to adolescence. But we all know that Lincoln split the rails for such fences in Illinois, where a stone is as rare as a hill to coast on, and in Virginia itself you may still see them, mellowed by time, overgrown and flower-bordered, exactly comporting with the long horizontals of the pines and the roof trees of the negro cabins. One such fence I have never forgotten. Two of us had come out of the Dismal Swamp, upon the western side, or “the coast,” as it is called. It had been a hard tramp out, through the damp heat of the almost tropic swamp growth, in mud half up to our knees. We emerged upon the sandy road at sunset time, and a cool, fresh breeze was stirring from the higher regions as we turned south. To our right was the old rail fence, zigzagging along to keep us company, with some unknown flower blooming, and as it seems to me now faintly fragrant, in the alternate angles. Behind this fence were the level fields, some bearing cotton, some corn, but most of them filled with row on row of the



humble peanut. Now and then, at the back of the fields, we saw a gray negro cabin, seemingly as old and artless, and surely as virgin of paint, as the fence itself; and always at the far edge of the fields, paralleling our road, marched a long procession of southern pines, their tops as level as the sky line of a Paris boulevard, the daggers of the pink sunset between their trunks. Ever the swamp, gloomy and darkening with the coming night, was on our left, but westward the old rail fence accompanied us, and the friendly cabins against the pines; and in the gathering twilight we heard from far off the sound of a negro singing.

The roadside wall or fence, too, besides its landscape charm and friendliness, is interesting as the highway of the lesser travellers. Man is the vagabond of the wheel ruts; the squirrel takes the wall or the topmost rail. The birds, too, in their migrations, like to rest upon this rail, or even to dwell near it in preference to the seemingly safer fields and woods. Just as you will see the telegraph wires lined with swallows on the approaches leading into a city, you will find innumerable birds along the country track in the trees and bushes or even on the wall or fence itself. They seem to feel the vagabondage of the open road, even though they have all the heavens for their highway.

Nearly every New Englander's father or grandfather (or so the family legends run) once laid a barbed-wire fence on posts made of willow, and hence the pollards by



The pattern of fields and pastures . . . stitched with stone walls



the brook. It seems a little incredible that so many Yankees could have been ignorant of the persistence of the will-to-live in willows—or was it their Puritan way of serving beauty under the deception of utilitarianism? Beauty they did serve, at any rate, for the fence posts always lived and grew into a noble row of trunks, biennially cut back to a head an axe-reach above the ground, and so always bristling with a great cluster of rich, glossy leaf stalks in Summer and with tawny, naked spears in Winter, shining on a dull day over the snow and the icy brook like a bit of captured sunlight. And what whistles they made in the Spring! I wonder how many of my readers could make a willow whistle now? I believe the art is lost.

There is one bit of old stone wall I have not yet spoken of, keeping it till the last in my memories of walls and fences. It was some two miles from my boyhood home, on the way to a certain desirable swimming hole in the Ipswich River, and the recollection of it is still so vivid in my brain that I can call up the exact sensations it evoked, though I have not looked upon it now these twenty years. It could not, however, have been without its counterparts elsewhere, and I have often wondered if its effect upon me in boyhood is not a remembered possession of many another New England lad. Curiously enough, in later years, I found that Ruskin had shared with me my emotions (the force of my original sensation is such that I am compelled to the

egotistical transposition!), though Ruskin did not know the stone wall in *his* picture, only the dome of pasture.

The road to the Ipswich meadows led down a slope and across a considerable cultivated plain, almost entirely rich, alluvial grass land. It was carefully kept and trimmed with a scythe behind the machine, to secure every blade of grass close up to the walls and fences. There were no hedgerows here. On the way down I never noticed my particular stone wall, or, if I did, it was only to wonder how it could be so tame and commonplace from this viewpoint. But after the swim, lazy with too long immersion in warm fresh water, and with the hot rays of the noonday sun baking on our necks and sending up films of heat from the railroad bed which ran through the bottom land, we would cross the plain slowly, the hay cutters clicking like giant grasshoppers in the fields, and then I would see my wall and feel its wonder.

It was a bare, gray, naked wall, cresting the ridge of the plain against the sky, and the green meadows and fields were like a long billow of the land gradually swelling up into a wave crest, with the gray wall as the foam. At first I thought of it as a wonderful place to shelter a defending regiment, while we boys were the enemy—Pickett's men, perhaps—charging across the level. But the impress of a great wave of the land gradually grew stronger and captured my whole im-



agination, and then suddenly I realized that the sea, the great, blue, boundless open sea, was on the other side of that wall and when I reached the top I should behold it! Just before the road reached the sharp pitch of the ridge, it swung abruptly to the right, to avoid a steep ascent, and here the impression was strongest. The wall stretched naked against the sky. Nothing whatever was visible beyond it, not even a treetop. The dome of the firmament dropped down majestically behind, with infinite depths of aërial perspective where the cloud ships rode, exactly as it drops down to the far horizon line of the ocean. Here, at this point, I used to pause and tingle with the sensation, a feeling of the immanence of the sea, an illusion amounting almost to belief that when I reached the top I should indeed behold the line where the sky and water meet. I think my feeling of the sea at these moments was a more profound sensation than the actual sight of the ocean ever awakened.

I may have been a little ashamed to confess my sensations to the boys who accompanied me, for I do not recall that any of them ever expressed the same illusion. It would not have been strange, however, if they could not share it, for none of them, as I recall, was familiar with the ocean. But in after years I came upon a passage in Ruskin—in “Modern Painters,” I think—wherein he speaks of the strange illusion of the sea imparted by a level earth line against the sky, shutting out all sight of what lies beyond, and I read his words

with almost a shock of familiarity. He was my favourite author for several months thereafter!

It was more than a quarter of a century ago that my gray stone wall gave me so profoundly the sensation of the sea, rising above the inland meadows of Middlesex, sharp against the sky. Yet the mystery, the lure, the call to wonder and to dreams, which the ocean holds for the heart of youth were crystallized for me by that stone wall upon its ridge, and even to-day when I approach the sea, feeling its invisible presence in the great drop of sky behind some dune of sand, it is the memory of my wall which wakes and stirs within me, and I hear the hot cicada click of the mowing machines in the fields and feel once more the strange pain of dreaming boyhood when the imagination has taken full command.

The other day I wandered to an upland pasture and heard the mowers in a distant field. The day was hot. The grasshoppers rose in a startled swarm about my knees as I walked. The sunshine in the valley was like an amber flood and the distant mountains were smoky gray, almost like waves of floating vapour. I lay down presently under the shade of a laurel bush, to pick and munch some checkerberry leaves which I saw growing there—and suddenly from this lower angle I saw the near-by wall sharp against the sky, and nothing beyond save the great spaces of aerial perspective and an Himalayan cumulus. It was my old stone wall, and beyond lay the sea! No, beyond lay the

Brewer mowing, down the farther slope, where Jim Brewer was even now at work; and it would be a good time, incidentally, to go and ask him if he could come to-morrow or next day and cut my rear lot. But I did not go. I lay in the shade of the laurel bush and looked, at the wall, and at the great drop of the sky beyond growing pearly pink with afternoon, as it does out over the waters, while the memories of boyhood came back upon me and the wonder of the sea, the haunting call for voyages of the untried soul. The shadow of my laurel bush crept eastward, the click of the mowers ceased, a song-sparrow sang his even-song, before I rose from my converse with a dream. I did not look over into Jim Brewer's mowing, but climbed to my feet with my face to the west, and the last sight of my wall was a line of old gray stones against the pearly sky.

"The sea *is* over there!" I said, and walked homeward through strange, familiar fields.

## X

### BRIDGES

IS THERE any one for whom, since his earliest childhood, bridges have not had a curious, if perhaps almost unconscious, fascination?

I stood with grooms and porters on the bridge,

wrote Tennyson, beginning his reconstruction of the tale of Coventry's Queen. What were the grooms and porters doing there? What was the poet doing there? We have his word that they were not crossing. As the reporter for the *Sun* once said of the press agent, no doubt they were busily standing still. What place is so inviting to stand busily still upon as a bridge? The world goes by you there in open view. Beneath flows the river, boats and bargess lipping under your feet on its tide, and you look upon the backs of the rowers or the piles of cargo on the decks of the larger craft. To left and right you see the city, perhaps, lying in perspective along the banks, hints of Whistler etchings in the old river-front buildings, and spires shooting up behind them. Out of the city comes a street, to either end of the bridge, and once on the

span it is like an artery stripped of the surrounding flesh. You see the blood-flow of the town's traffic with startling clearness. Motors and vans, cabs and wagons, cars and pedestrians, rumble behind you as you lean on the rail, and when you turn to watch them are thrown into sharp relief against the river and sky—perhaps against the foggy blue-gold of the harbour mouth downstream. Where else but standing on the bridge with grooms and porters could Tennyson have seen Coventry go past, and dreamed again the ancient legend of her Queen? Where but on Westminster Bridge could Wordsworth have stood, the open sky above him, the lapping water below, and seen the sun come up over London and

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie :  
Open to the fields and to the sky—?

Boston, too, is at her best and most characteristic when seen from the Cambridge bridges, even that on which Longfellow stood at midnight and pretended he was a pessimist. Westward from the upper bridge, over the white caps of the basin, the sun declines behind Corey Hill in Brookline. Southward stretches the broad highway of the bridge, alive with traffic, vanishing into the brick wilderness of the town. Southeastward, looking once more across the dancing waters of the basin, you see the new embankment flashing green, and beyond that the mile-long row of houses on



Beacon Street, curving gracefully at the lower end to the granite towers of the middle bridge. Hidden behind this level line of houses is the smoky city, with tall church towers rising at intervals; and far to the left the city comes into view—tier on tier of red brick dwellings climbing up the slopes of Beacon Hill to the golden dome of the State House. Perhaps an eight-oared shell comes downstream as you stand by the rail, the bare, brown backs of the rowers knotting with the play of tense muscles underneath the tan. The sharp bow disappears beneath you, and, following the crowd, you rush across the bridge to the other side and again look down. Out from the shadow shoots the arrow-like bow, then the knotted backs of the oarsmen, their eight long sweeps flashing in beautiful rhythmic swing, then the little coxswain with a megaphone strapped to his mouth. It is scarcely a moment before the shell is far downstream, the sweeps dripping silver on the wind-wrinkled water. The crowd loiters on, its bit of bridge excitement over. The harbour haze drifts above the golden dome on Beacon Hill, and the tiers of red brick dwellings rising to it send back the westering sun from their windows. Few cities anywhere are more beautiful than Boston from the upper Cambridge bridge.

There is beauty, too, of a different and stupendous kind in the bridges that connect Manhattan Island with Brooklyn or the mainland. Your first feeling at these

bridges is always one of admiration, even of awe, for modern engineering. To stand on the East River docks and see the gigantic, wirespun, airy boulevard of the Brooklyn Bridge go leaping up into space and descend in a curve of marvellous grace into the granite gorges of lower Manhattan is to experience a sensation no other city on earth can offer you. Even the glittering white Matterhorn of the Woolworth Tower, toward which the distant end of the bridge seems diving, is less impressive than the space-hung boulevard of the bridge itself. It would have been from the foot-path of this bridge, too, that Wordsworth would have written his sonnet to Manhattan—we wonder in what spirit of solemn awe or bitter scorn?

The appeal of bridges to man's imaginative interest is based, of course, upon deep racial facts. Bridges, no less than ships, are a symbol of man's conquest of his environment. They are an escape from the tyranny of Nature. The first bridge, no doubt, was the bridge the animals still use—a fallen tree across a little stream. The next step was to fell a tree when a bridge was needed, the next to provide supports for it, the next to extend the length of span by mid-stream structures. Every step on the way meant a rise in the scale of civilization, and the simplest bit of plank across a brook, where the path winds down through the trees, has for us the curious interest of primitive things, taking us back many ages in our history.

Bridges, too, have always been a strategic point in times of war—bottle necks for defence; and our consciousness carries the memory of this fact. We have all fought with Horatius by the yellow Tiber, upon the farther side, while Roman axes hewed down the timbers behind us! We have all been proud, who could, that some ancestor of ours fired one of those shots heard, round the world, “by the rude bridge that spanned the flood” of the Concord River (the flood being, to be sure, a small, dark, sluggish, quiet stream meandering through peaceful meadows). But the rude span which crossed it was unquestionably a bridge, and the stream too wide to jump, so the point was strategic, and on one side stood the redcoats, on the other the embattled farmers of Middlesex, and the rifles spoke which made a nation free. All boys have fought beside Napoleon, and know the bridge of Lodi. All boys, living in the tales of battles (which to them are history), know a hundred bridges, great and small, where an advance was checked or a rear guard successfully covered a retreat; and every boy sees the reason for this strategic importance of bridges and looks upon them with interest and respect.

Then, too, there is the bridge Cæsar built across the Rhine—which wakes, perhaps, less pleasant memories. Nor must London Bridge be forgotten, which in our early childhood was in constant process of falling down, to a tune we shall never forget. The mammoth im-

portance of such a catastrophe as the destruction of London Bridge can in no way be more justly estimated than by the persistence through the generations of this song-game.

It is curious how characteristic bridges are of the region or the civilization which produced them. What could be more characteristic of the Titanic materialism of New York than the high-leaping boulevards of steel which span the East River? They are the bridges which befit Manhattan no less than the corduroy, laid on two string pieces formed by felling hemlocks across the rushing mountain stream, befits the logging road which winds into the forests under Carrigain. The bridges of Florence, too—the Ponte Vecchio, let us say—are composed of exquisite ancient arches of hewn stone, in perfect proportion, leading into squares where stone architecture in exquisite proportion speaks of the marvellous Renaissance. They are not vast, these bridges. They do not leap. They are gravelly monumental, however, on the scale of the city, built by artists, to endure. As exactly fitted to their age and station were the old covered bridges of New England—nay, are, for many a one still stands across the Connecticut or the Androscoggin, witness to the enduring qualities of native oak; we cannot say a mute witness, because there was never yet a New England covered bridge in which the planking did not rattle.

The road that winds down the hills to the covered

bridge, or crosses the green fields of the intervale, is white with dust and lined with bramble-covered stone walls and elm trees or maples. Always, as it draws near, it runs up a little incline to the bridge (perhaps just after you have paid your toll at the toll gate); and warned by a large sign over the entrance you pull your horses down to a walk or reduce the speed of your motor. You pass at once out of the hot sunshine into the dusty dimness of the long, telescope-like shed, and the planks rumble beneath your wheels. What a curious smell there is in the old covered bridge! It is like no other smell in the world, and quite indescribable to one who has never sniffed it—not the smell of a country barn, nor of a circus ring, yet reminiscent of both, with a new quality entirely its own. It always brings back my childhood to me with a sudden, startling vividness, and I recall the covered bridge across the Androscoggin at Bethel, with ancient circus posters flaring from the dusty walls, with tin placards on every beam proclaiming some magic spavin cure, with bits of hay hanging from the cobwebs, pulled from a towering load recently passed through, and finally with exquisite landscapes of the great curve of the river, the green fields, and the far blue peaks of the Presidentials, framed through the square windows—for every covered bridge is lighted by square windows at orthodox intervals. The road on either side of that bridge is as vague in my memory as yesterday's breakfast; but



the entrance—a shadowy cave where dust motes danced in the rays which streamed from cracks between the boarding—and every detail of the interior, including the smell, are so clear and vivid that I have only to shut my eyes and be five years old again.

The old New England covered bridge (covered, of course, to protect the traffic from the winter blasts during the long crossing) had the box-like simplicity of the New England farmhouse and barn. It was made of wood, on stone piers, exactly as the barns and houses were. It was invariably painted red, or else left to weather a soft mouse-gray. It could never have been a seemly approach to a city, yet in its setting of country road and pasture, with the wide, clear, brown river beneath it and the simple, box-like red or gray barns on the distant hills, it not only admirably filled its function of getting the farmer across the wide stream with ears unfrozen in the bitterest storms, but, Winter or Summer, it fitted the landscape. What should theoretically have been angular and clumsy toned into the scheme with a quaint, stiff grace, and threw its red reflection into the water. Wherever such a bridge still stands, connecting communities which retain the simplicity of the old New England, it is a picturesque delight. Wherever such a bridge is reached by a tarvia road, perhaps with a steel trolley span beside it and modern houses on either bank, it is almost pathetically ugly, and, I have discovered, does not even retain its characteristic smell.

The old covered bridge belonged to a New England that is too rapidly vanishing—to the age of the travelling circus and the carry-all and first-growth timber and “old-fashioned snowstorms.” A motor looks as out of place in one as the one-hoss shay on Fifth Avenue.

We all, I suppose, have our favourite and familiar little bridges—memories of childhood, summer possessions, or, perhaps, enjoyed the year through. There used to be a bridge on the way to my grandfather’s house which always filled me with joy, because upon it I caught the first sight of the stream which was to give me a month of unalloyed delight—a pretty glimpse, with a curve of the river on one side and on the other the dark, glossy millpond, green with lily pads, and the gray mill with its gigantic pile of fragrant sawdust beyond. This little bridge was of a well-recognized type—wooden string pieces set from stone piers built out on either bank, with a rough and picturesque railing of poles upon which you leaned to look down into the water, or to fish. The loose planking rattled, and I remember vividly the delightful sensation of rowing under the bridge into the shadow, on a hot summer day, and waiting there till a team passed overhead, to see the dust sift down through the chinks, golden, perhaps, in a ray of sunlight, and to hear its soft, almost bell-like tinkle on the water. The fact that the people in the team overhead didn’t know we were under the bridge lent an added zest to the adventure.

There are many such wooden bridges still left on back roads where motor traffic has not necessitated a change. Often they are as picturesque, almost, as a consciously designed bridge in Japan, with an artless grace in the rough, semicircular arch occasionally constructed with the pole railing, or the angular curve of the base line over a mid-stream prop. If you go down to the river level in winter, when the banks are white with snow, and only in the centre of the current is there any water visible, when the bare trees are sharp and delicate against the sky and the road but three tracks of blue shadow, you will see the bridge etched in timber on a field of white, with naïve, unconscious picturesqueness, almost as much a part of nature as the nude maples beyond.

On the farther side of Grandfather's house was a second bridge, crossing the same river—which meandered in great loops through the meadows, going a mile while the road went three hundred yards. This was called the Red Bridge. It was much more pretentious, but far less attractive to the eye, than the first one. The sides, instead of being open railing, were composed of double solid board fences, two feet apart, and boxed in along the top. Unless you were a very tall man, you could not look over them, so that when you stood on this bridge you didn't see the river at all. But you could climb up on them! On top was a two-foot-wide, perilous path, with a sheer drop of twenty

feet to the river on one side, and your mother's express command never to walk across spurring you on, not to mention the admiring gaze of your small companion. The Red Bridge, too (which must have been painted about once every generation), was a superb place for bill-posting. It fairly blazed with spavin cures, liniments for man and beast, bargains in farm machinery, announcements of county fairs, and circus posters. How well I remember one fair trapeze performer who was depicted in the act of flying through the air, hands gracefully outstretched toward a far-distant, swinging perch, and whose pink legs defied the winter storms and summer suns long after the rest of her anatomy had faded quite from view—which was not without its ironic touch in our Puritan community!

A quaint feature of country bridges that is now disappearing was the turnout on the roadway beside them, when the stream was a small one, permitting you to drive your horse through the ford and up the opposite bank to the road again, thus watering him without getting out of the carriage. It was bad, undoubtedly, for the carriage wheels, but the horses certainly enjoyed it, and many a time have I left my fishpole propped against the rail, with the float bobbing far downstream, to cross the bridge and watch some thirsty horse suck up the water noisily, while the foam drifted away from his nostrils and his driver let the reins dangle and inquired of me (usually with annoying derisiveness): "Heow air



Fitted to their age and station were the covered bridges  
of New England





they bitin' ter-day, son?" Those drinking pools were excellent places to wade in, too, on your way home from berry picking, when there didn't happen to be a real swimming hole on the lower side of the bridge. I don't know why our swimming holes were always by a bridge, but they invariably were, perhaps because a stream is apt to be narrowest just before it widens into a pool. At any rate, we were always forced to expose our nakedness just below the roadway where it crossed on the rattling timbers, and it was the part of honour and decency to go under water when a carry-all passed, and to stay under if there were ladies in it until the rumble of the boards had ceased. Many a boy learned to dive by being caught on the left bank, where there were no trees or bushes, a sudden clatter of hoofs or the sound of women's voices warning him that he must leap.

Among the most interesting of little roads are the lanes on a farm which radiate out from the barn into the hayfields, the orchard, the sugar grove, the timber; and among the most interesting of little bridges are those on which these lanes and farm paths cross the brooks. Such bridges are of the simplest construction, often but a few planks laid on a couple of beams, without any railing, to enable the hayracks to cross the brook, which here is almost hidden deep down in the long grass and flows lazily toward the river as if resting after its tumble from the hills. But the view from such a little bridge is always charming. On either side the winding of the

brook is visible, a snake-like indentation in the green of the meadow. The cart tracks of the hay road lead back from the bridge to the great barn, and forward into the sunny reaches of the fields, or even farther into the timber. The verdant interval is ringed with hills, near and wooded, far off and blue. The grasshoppers leap in a tiny cloud about your feet as you walk, the crickets chirrup, and the bobolinks and larks are busy in the air. Perhaps from the distance comes the steady *click, click, click* of a mowing machine, hottest of summer sounds. For many years when I was pent in a city ten months of the year, just such a bridge was always in my dreams, a bridge that lets the sugar grove brook pass under on its way to the brown Ham Branch and invites your eye to wander up the valley to the blue nobility of Moosilauke, most beautiful of mountains.

Scarcely less to be desired is the little foot-bridge which crosses the brook farther up, where it still tumbles and talks amid the trees. The path is a way of dead leaves and dark mould and wild flowers, cloistered amid great tree trunks. But from the tiny bridge a vista suddenly opens. The brook has cleared a sight-line down the slope through the forest, and you glimpse unexpectedly the green meadows out there in the sun, turning from emerald to gold as the sun sets, and the songs of the hermit thrushes throb in the cool dimness about you.

Less artless and simple than the little bridges of

the farm, but scarcely less peaceful and with a calm beauty all their own, are the little bridges which cross canals. Nothing is so soothing and sedative as a canal, with its endless levels, its winding tow path, its brimming, quiet water. A canal always seems old, and always lazy. It takes the reflection of every bridge as in a mirror, whether the white-washed bridge near Princeton, where the lock-keeper's house, white-washed, too, is gay with red geraniums, and the lazy barges are few and far between, or some more ancient stone arch in England, formal like the countryside, completed by the reflection into a perfect circle save where the tow path cuts into the circumference. Sometimes there is hurry on the bridges; a motor whizzes across, or a galloping horse clatters. How foolish such haste seems from the level of the canal! Your canoe drifts to the gentle impulse of your paddle, and as you pass under the shadow of the bridge the life of roads, leading into distant towns, into rush and turmoil, seems oddly far off and unreal. The bridge is a reminder of things you had forgotten.

The modern steel bridge has not yet found itself. It is useful enough, but too seldom beautiful. The steel building is clothed in stone, but the bridge goes naked, with unlovely skeleton. The Brooklyn Bridge, with its stone suspension towers, and the new Charles Street bridge between Cambridge and Boston, where the steel is so fleshed with granite that the skeleton seems solid,

show clearly enough the importance of apparent solidity in the aesthetic appeal of bridges—unless the steel framework can find some new, airy grace of its own. Occasionally we meet with a small steel bridge, not designed for bearing heavy traffic, which does achieve a pleasant effect of strength in lightness; and of course the high railroad trestle, with its tall, lean piers and its bare, level top, has a quaint, spider-like grace as it strides the chasm and the foaming mountain torrent, bearing the train far aloft against the face of the cliffs upon its airy slenderness. The suspension type of bridge is not a new one. The similarity between one of those “home-made” suspension bridges for foot passengers, so common on our American rivers, which consists of a plank walk hung between two cables stretched from trees on either bank, and the pictures of native rope bridges in the Andes, is striking. Our little suspension bridge across the Housatonic, which sways so deliciously when we cross upon it, and so terrifies the dog, is, after all, but a pocket edition of the boulevards that leap the East River out of the flanks of Manhattan. But the cantilever bridges of steel are something new as well as angular, and grace is not yet their attribute, nor monumental solidity, either. Unlike the builders of the Renaissance, our engineers are not yet artists. But this does not mean that we must hark wailfully back to Ruskin for an expression of our feelings. Why should we



have so much confidence in the past, and none in the future?

Pater, in his famous "Conclusion" (once, strange as it seems, infamous, rather), says,

Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.

Is there not, perhaps, a little of this melancholy metaphysic in our contemplation of bridges? Some readers will undoubtedly recall William Morris's tale, "The Sundering Flood," with its yearning figure on either bank of the uncrossed stream—young, hot hearts aflame. We think of them, perhaps, when we come to a river bank and see upon the farther shore green fields and cool woods, with white roads leading "over the hills and far away" into a land of untried delights—but no bridge crossing thither. Standing balked upon the bank of the "sundering flood," we realize afresh what a part bridges have played in the happiness and progress of individuals and the race; we realize it from that primitive viewpoint of unsatisfied need, which is still humanity's greatest teacher.

But suppose a bridge is there; suppose it leads out over the swirling current, and shows us water vistas

as we pause at mid-stream to look left and right before we pass on into the pleasant adventures that await. Shall we not anticipate those adventures with a certain gravity, wondering whether, after all, the bridge which takes us into realms unexplored can ever take us out of ourselves, can lead us to sights which are not already irrevocably conditioned by our personal vision, can ever span the gulf between that self which alone we may ever hope to know, and that not-our-self which is all the world else? The reflection is melancholy, and it would not do to dwell too long upon it, or else the tramp-adventurer no less than Hamlet would find his conscience "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" till it lost the name of action. Yet for a moment, however brief, it can hardly be escaped. The road winds down the pleasant hills to the bridge, and for a span it is isolated and alone as it crosses the brown water to the unknown hills beyond, with villages in their green folds and vistas through their intervalles. On that isolated span the individual is alone, as well. The whence and whither of his life flashes its questioning beam upon him, perhaps the primal allegory of the running river beneath his feet murmurs sadly in the sound of the waters, and even his companion seems suddenly strange—he is conscious of the sundering flood that rolls forever between personalities.

But a hay cart rattles on the planking, the smell of the

hay mingles with the faint odour of fresh running water, the farmer has a cheery hail, a swallow skims the river, and the sky is blue! Once more the tramp-adventurer sets his feet toward the unknown land beyond the bridge, and lights his pipe afresh.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE LITTLE TOWN ON THE HILL

IT WAS many years ago that I first alighted from the train at a station bearing the Biblical name of Zoar, and, after the train had disappeared up the winding track, felt my tortured ears suddenly soothed with the sweet silence, my lungs with the keen air. Just below the track the rapid brown Deerfield River ran whispering over stones. Opposite the tiny station, across the highway, were two or three houses. Behind them leapt up the wooded walls of the gorge, reproduced on the opposite side of the river. Looking up stream or down, I could see great wooded headlands jutting out—a wild and picturesque cañon. After the dust and smell of the train, the faint odour of the rapid water was cool and agreeable. I drew a deep breath before turning to find the stage driver who would take me from Zoar up the walls of the gorge to the little village on the hills above.

It was not difficult to find him, as he was the only person on the platform besides myself and the station agent. Conversely, I was his only passenger. In addition to me and my luggage his load consisted of

a mail bag, four sacks of feed, and a bundle of morning newspapers. He belonged to the old-fashioned communicative school of Yankee stage drivers, and before we had accomplished the six uphill miles to the village (he said it was eight up and four down, but averaged six, so they marked it six on the maps), I was in possession of a considerable body of local history, New England folk-lore, and highly flavoured, individual philosophy. Alas! in those days I kept no note book, (nor do I now, except spasmodically!), and this particular stage driver has long since carried his last mail, so I cannot return to atone for my omission. But it was from his lips, I remember, that I first heard the story of the old woman who read in her Bible that faith would remove mountains. As a particular mountain behind her house annoyed her by shutting off the late afternoon sun (he showed me the identical hill), she decided to exercise her faith and will it to be gone, which she accordingly did just as it was spoiling what promised to be a particularly choice sunset. However, she gave it all night to get out of the way, and in the morning ran expectantly to the window. It was still there.

“Well, I knew it would be!” she said.

The road we were plodding up the hill led beside a dashing, fern-embroidered and hemlock-shaded brook, which had been the primal engineer without whose aid no road could have been built. It was a beautiful



brook, full of waterfalls, and every fall, I am sure, was duplicated by a thank-you-marm in the road. There would be a short, steep ascent, then a high thank-you-marm at the top, a stretch less steep, then another sharp upgrade and another thank-you-marm. It was as if the winding road was cascading down the mountain gorge. The horses knew exactly how to pull the rear wheels over one of these thank-you-marms and let them settle into the little hollow above, which held the wagon stationary while the horses caught their breath.

"Hosses has got a lot o' sense," the driver said on one such occasion. "They don't tire themselves out ef you don't push 'em. They take things natural. A man don't. He don't let up till all the steam's out o' the boiler."

Driving on this theory, he was a long time getting to the upland, but I still recall the pleasures of that ride, the rushing, ferny brook, the solemn hemlocks, the steep mountain walls, the smell of woods and wild flowers and brown water on the run. We came at last into a small upland intervale, where there was a cleared field and a house, and then, passing them and climbing another slope, into a larger intervale, with more fields and several houses. But there was still a hill ahead of us, and mountain walls on either side, and we must have ascended two hundred feet more before we reached the lower end of the village.

This, my driver told me, was the "new" village,

though it looked old enough to have been there always. On one side of the road the brook had been dammed into a little mill pond, full of lily pads, and between the dam and the highway stood the sawmill, a rough lean-to of weathered, mouse-gray boards, the big saw singing its last snarling song for the day as we passed by, the smell of fresh-cut pine flooding the surrounding air. Just beyond the mill was the town hall, a small building about the size of the traditional "little red school house," and neatly painted white. Beyond that was a neat white church, of about the same size. Then came a house or two. On the opposite side of the road were other houses, and the general store and post office, where we left the mail, the papers, and the bags of feed. It was an ancient story-and-a-half building, with a front veranda supported by columns. The hitching posts in front were chewed into fantastic totem poles by hungry horses. Around each white column on the veranda, shoulder-high, was a darker ring where the village had leaned, waiting for the mail. On the floor of the veranda, flanking the door, stood ploughs and rakes and other agricultural implements. Inside were the usual curiously scented gloom, the ancient collection of groceries, calico, thread, overalls, straw hats, tobacco, axe handles, saws, kerosene, and the inevitable bunch of bananas. Since those days, a black tin rack of souvenir post cards has been added, but otherwise there has been but little change.

Yet even here we were not at the top of the hill. We were on a plateau, to be sure, and a road branched to the west, just beyond the store, and another, above the mill pond, turned to the east. But both roads led to farms which could be seen pushing their cleared pastures up toward higher wooded summits, and ahead the main road still climbed toward the "old" village. With a lighter load, we continued our journey, coming, after nearly half a mile, almost to the top of the world, and finding to my amazement the weed-grown remnants of a village green, with two fine old Colonial houses facing it, houses with delicate fanlights over the doors and graceful Greek borders under the eaves, and on one side a dilapidated building which had been the town hall a century ago—a building three times the size of the present hall; on the other, a white meeting house similarly dilapidated and similarly superior in size to the new. Here the road divided, one branch going on through the upland pastures, still climbing steadily till it crested the two-thousand-foot divide between Massachusetts and Vermont, the other keeping to the sixteen-hundred-foot level and making for the hills of North Heath to the east. It was toward one of those hills the stage driver pointed, and delivered his final observation.

"There's a cemetery over yonder on that hill," he remarked, "which they say is the highest p'int o' cultivated ground in Massachusetts."

I came to know this village well in the days that fol-

lowed—to know, and to love, and to wonder at it. Settled<sup>7</sup> in the eighteenth century by adventurous pioneers who pushed on up into the hills from Deerfield, it must always have been remote, inaccessible, drift-piled in winter, with a thin, rocky soil. Nor, without artillery on either side, is it easy to see why such a hilltop village was much easier to defend from a surprise attack by the Indians than a village amid rich valley meadows. The hills were too broken, the forests too numerous, to afford an unobstructed view for any distance. It may be that the Indians themselves avoided the hills—there is considerable testimony to that effect, especially in the White Mountains. It may also be that the prevalence of “summer fever” in Colonial times (which, of course, was typhoid fever from contaminated wells) caused our ancestors to seek the hills, where they drank spring water and attributed their health to the absence of “poisonous vapours” from the lowlands. Then, too, in many cases it was easier to maintain trails over the uplands than in the valleys. But still more, I like to fancy, it was the pioneer urge that brought the first settlers up the river gorges, and then up the side gorges of the tributary brooks, till some upland beaver meadow attracted their attention, offering a ready-made clearing to start on, with superb timber all about and unlimited water power for their needs. These early pioneers lived a self-sufficient life, and perhaps when you are entirely independent of the

outside world, the human instinct is to get upon a hill. How else, at any rate, can we explain so many of our New England hamlets which were founded and flourished more than a century ago, and with the growth of modern transportation and industrialism have gradually been slipping down to the valleys, or dying of dry rot, yielding up their hard-won fields to the advancing waves of the forest?

In this hill town where the stage driver brought me there was a notable fire in 1795, or thereabouts. It burned the church to the ground, and with the church it destroyed the Covenant. The minister at that time was the Reverend Preserved Smith, a man of liberal mind and warm heart, who at once set about rebuilding his sheepfold. But he did not attempt to restore the Covenant. It is said that neither he nor his congregation could recall definitely all its Calvinistic ramifications, and quite evidently they were not desirous of sending away to the orthodox lowlands for aid. Therefore the new church had no Covenant, and for a generation the Reverend Preserved Smith preached liberal religion to his flock, up here on the windy hilltops, and not a soul from the outside world interfered. Of course, he was at last discovered in his heinous offence, and the governing body of the New England church took drastic action; but it was too late. A generation without a Covenant and a creed had set the village on the liberal path, and to this day the church remains Unitarian.



I love to think of those ancient days on the hilltop, when a breed of men and women who tilled the fields, hewed the forest, spun their own warm woollen cloth, built solidly and well their storm-defying houses, could wrestle with the dogmas of Calvinism, overthrow them, struggle up toward liberal thought, and, from their high-flung pastures, defy the ecclesiastical big-wigs on the plains. They were a splendid race, and each generation sent out splendid men into the nation. Even in my boyhood they were still a splendid race, though an aged one. They were narrow, they were often ignorant, but they were shrewd, humorous, independent, neighbourly, with a love for their hills less expressive, perhaps, but no less intense than the love of the Southern mountaineers. I once encountered a mountaineer in the Tennessee Cumberlands who had gone to Texas and started well on a fine ranch. But, after two years, he was back again in his tumble-down cabin at the head of Thumping Dick Cove.

“Didn’t you like Texas?” I asked him.

“Yes,” he drawled. “I liked it well enough. But come every Spring, I took to chillin’. It didn’t agree with me.”

That was his way of saying he was so homesick for his hills that he gave up ambition and the prospects of a comfortable fortune to return to his mountain cove-side.

So the old folk used to be in our New England hill

towns when I first made their acquaintance. Already their lot was getting hard, as the lowlands drained the best of their youngsters away from them, and our changing civilization made the problem of living without money to exchange for goods once produced at home, increasingly difficult. But they loved their homes, they cherished intensively their traditions, in silence they would take me to some hilltop whence a vista stretched over green mountain billows and ravines of steely shadow to the far plains or the blue saddle of Graylock, and in the sunset hush and still time of the world let their gray eyes wander back at last to the little white village straggling up the slope at their feet, and say, gruffly: "It's kind o' sightly, hain't it?"

But that generation is almost gone, and with its passing many a white farmhouse built of home-hewn oak and chestnut beams, of clear pine boarding and clapboards cut from first-growth spruce, is vacant of human occupants, and soon will be in ruins. The hill-top towns are passing, the stock who settled them is dying out. There are favoured villages, to be sure, where the rising tide of summer home seekers has brought a new prosperity, though a prosperity quite unlike the old and lacking its flavour of democratic independence. In some cases, too, the driving through of state highways by the shortest route, over hill and dale, has brought certain towns into new communication with the outside world. But for the most part our

hilltop communities are slipping rapidly back into decay and even, at times, degeneracy. It seems almost impossible for the pioneer to remain true to his breed when once the modern world has surrounded him. His good young blood begins to hear the siren call of the cities, and decay sets in.

Yet even in their decay our hill towns keep an old-world charm. Their names, too, are picturesque. There is Florida, on top of the mountain close to the new Mohawk Trail. It was here that a passing automobilist once asked a little girl by the roadside where she lived.

"Florida," the child replied.

"My, you are a long way from home, aren't you?" exclaimed the tourist.

Then there is Peru, swept by all the winds that blow, where the general store and the two or three houses at the crossroads, which you reach after an endless climb, mark the centre of village life, and it might be said (as it is said of Goshen, Connecticut) that the inhabitants never use their snow till the second Winter. Peru is a hotbed of political strife, and the license question, too, is a burning issue. Last year the town went wet by a large majority, twenty-one to fourteen, if I remember correctly. Mount Washington Township, under the cone of Mount Everett, and above the leaping Bash Bish Falls, boasts fourteen voters, twelve of them staunch Republicans. It is said that every man in the village

holds a town office. New Marlborough (birthplace of "The Learned Blacksmith") and Monterey are other towns with sonorous names. They are reached only by the toilsome ascent of Three Mile Hill, and several other hills besides, and though in Summer a new life has come to them now, in Winter they are still as isolated as of old, dependent on themselves for their intellectual life and their enjoyment, if not any longer for their flour and clothing.

If you pass eastward from New Marlborough, ten miles over one of the worst roads in Massachusetts, in part through second-growth scrub (for all this hill region has been ruthlessly and stupidly stripped of its timber), in part through fields too plainly showing neglect or actual abandonment, you come presently to the other side of the plateau, where the hamlet of Sandisfield hangs on the brink. Here are the typical hill-town white dwellings, the meeting house and town hall, and here the road is so steep as it plunges over that all the soil has slipped off it and gone down the hill, leaving the naked ledge. It was in Sandisfield that the post-mastership was once forced on a reluctant citizen, who presently amused the county by advertising a horse for sale, and guaranteeing to throw in, to the purchaser, one harness and "a perfectly good United States post office."

Down the hill from Sandisfield is New Boston, in the upper gorge of the Farmington River. It is fifteen miles

from trolley or railroad, and the carriage road down the river is none too good. But it boasts its saw mill, its little street of white houses, even its Inn, once long ago a tavern on the Hartford-Albany turnpike, and now a resort of adventurous automobilists. The old turnpike climbs north through Otis, another hill town far removed from lines of modern travel and sitting sleepily by the road where once the stage coaches rattled through, its old tavern still open but all its romance gone, shabbiness and decay slowly but surely setting their mark on the village as a plucked flower withers in a vase.

But of all our towns upon a hill, Beartown has suffered most from the changed conditions. It lies—or, rather, it lay—on a high plateau, the ten-mile-long, flat summit of Beartown Mountain, between Monterey to the south and the valley town of South Lee to the north, with Stockbridge on the west and Tyringham on the northeast. A century ago this plateau, which is fertile and pleasant at an altitude of almost eighteen hundred feet, was inhabited by a considerable population and produced many thousands of dollars' worth of wool, lumber, grain, and maple sugar every year. There were well-tilled farms and acres of close-cropped pasture. Trout brooks flowed down its ravines. It boasted among the inhabitants a famous weather prophet, Levi Beebe, who is still a Berkshire tradition. Up and down the steep roads that climbed to it from the valley passed the wagons of the Beartown farmers.



But to-day Beartown, as a separate community, is a memory. There are but five families left on the entire plateau, and one or two of them live by squatter sovereignty. Recently there was an outbreak of small-pox among them which remained unknown to the county health authorities for more than a month. You climb the steep, winding road from South Lee, above the ravine where a trout brook babbles, and you meet nobody. You pass a cabin poorer than that of a Southern mountaineer and come to the fork where of old the road split to reach both sides of the plateau, finding one fork hardly more than a trail through the woods, while the other shows grass between the ruts. Mile after mile you tramp past fields unploughed, uncared for, or actually overrun by the new forest, with here and there the old stone walls cropping out amid the golden-rod and mulleins and raspberry vines, or striding off through the woods to show where once the open ranges lay. You pass houses sometimes with a shy-faced child at the door, staring as children stare who are unaccustomed to strangers; sometimes with only the blank countenance of dwellings vacant and abandoned. And finally, before the road plunges down the hill again to Monterey, you come upon the ruin of a genuine Colonial dwelling, with fanlight and panelled walls, and all the chaste luxury of our grandfathers' homes, settling slowly into a heap of bricks and rotten lumber. The forest stares hungrily at it from across the narrow road—this forest

which has already devoured the barn; and stalking it from behind are the young pines and birches, yearly advancing up the slope of the garden. You may look out across the tops of those birches mile upon mile to the far blue hills of Connecticut. It is a lovely and a peaceful and a fertile spot, where once the traffic passed hourly, gossip was exchanged at the gate, and the fields were animate with cattle. There is no life now but the birds and the squirrels, and a woodchuck which last year had made his hole beneath the kitchen door sill. This beautiful dwelling is a ruin in the wilderness. Beartown is no more. The hilltop that man conquered a brief century ago has been captured by a counter charge, and the wilderness once more holds possession.

There has been much talk in recent years about "redeeming" our western Massachusetts hill towns. From time to time agitations have been started to persuade the legislature to grant trolley franchises, which, in some mysterious way, the New Haven Railroad was going altruistically to use in the process of redemption. More promising have been the movements to bring state highways a little closer to these isolated communities. But I sometimes wonder if there is much use in all this effort. Our hill towns, except in such rare instances as Litchfield, Connecticut, were pioneer communities, even though they carried with them up the cascades of thank-you-marms certain architectural graces and theological formulæ of

the plains. They remained pioneer communities for a century, while all around them the conditions of life were changing, railroads were built, modern centralized industrialism was born, large-scale farming and stock raising superseded the old-time local husbandry, and what markets the hill people had found for their surplus produce disappeared. With the final exhaustion of their timber (due, of course, to ignorant and short-sighted methods of lumbering), they ceased to be desirable dwelling places for the intelligent and energetic, and became the abode, too often, only of the dull and unenergetic remnant of the old breed, who clung, from inertia, and feebly fought decay.

Is it of any use to talk of "redemption"? What redemption is possible? The old, happy, independent, stimulating agricultural life of these hill towns can never be restored, at any rate, because such isolation as still must remain their portion, thanks to their physical sites, cannot be endured by the energetic man or woman in the midst of the modern world. The pioneer perishes when his flank is turned by a railroad and a motor highway. Agriculturally, too, these hills are now of little actual value. To be sure, as sheep and even cattle ranges they have great potential possibilities, but we shall have to educate our entire nation before those possibilities can be realized, meanwhile meekly bowing our necks and opening our purses to the meat barons. Regarding our forests, however,

we are already a little enlightened, and as I tramp our hills and see the young spruce creeping back; as I note some patriarch pine spared by a miracle and bravely setting to work, with the aid of the wind and a near-by cleared field, to reforest the land with its seedlings, I often wonder if that is not the solution of our hill-town problem. We need the lumber, in all conscience, and as state forests the areas of these hill townships could be vastly more productive economically than they are to-day; they could, in many cases if not in most, give profitable employment to as many, if not more men than are at present registered on the voting lists; and, finally, there would be thus created; out of what to-day amounts to waste land, great public parks and game preserves which could be opened for vacation playgrounds, as the national forests of the West are opened. The hilltop villages need not die; indeed, they would not die. They would be at the heart of the forest life, human centres in the busy wilderness, and each in time, no doubt, as trails were laid out and forest vacation tramps or horseback trips became popular, would boast its inn, high above the plains, in true mountain air scented by spruce and hemlock and the fragrant odour of newly cut pine. Germany has (or had) its Black Forest—a national resource and a national playground. Our western Massachusetts hill country is neither a resource to-day nor even a playground, save in a few scattered cases. It might so easily be



both, and there seems little chance of its becoming either save by state reforestation. Our hill people cannot be trusted to reforest for themselves; they lack the intelligence now, even if they possessed the capital or the ambition. So I climb the thank-you-marm rapids past a tumbling brook, through scrub timber where the half-hidden hemlocks are bravely striving up amid the stump shoots, past fields where the vivid painter's brush and the white Queen Anne's lace are disputing possession with the invading forest, on my way toward some gently dying hamlet on the windy hills above—a hamlet without a doctor now and perhaps without a parson—and I dream of a day when the splendid, up-standing forest trees will rise again as they rose of old, to be harvested aright this second time for the good of all future generations; when through their cathedral aisles will wind such trails as sturdy trampers love, leading from camp to camp beside a waterfall or overlooking some splendid gorge or placid pond; and, still fulfilling its social function and keeping its pioneer character, each ancient village on its hilltop shall be the heart and watch tower of the people's preserve. It is a splendid dream, I think, and some day I expect myself to see its realization begun, even in Massachusetts, which has a quaint faculty of every now and then kicking clean over the traces of tradition in which it usually plods, and doing something radical and eminently sane.



## CHAPTER XII

R. F. D.

I NEVER write the initials, R. F. D., on the corner of an envelope, or see them written there, without a curious thrill, which I fancy must be shared by all country-bred Americans. Railroads, trolleys, motors, movies, magazines, the tremendous growth of our cities, have made us sophisticated, so that a large number of us have but the vaguest idea how the rest of us live, which sounds like a paradox but isn't. My boyhood, for example, was spent in a New England village less than fifteen miles from Boston, yet the North Parish, four miles away, was still only to be reached by a yellow stage coach slung on swaying straps, the partridges came for grain into our stable yard, and the lives of the farmers along the country roads were as well known to me as the cases of stuffed animals in the lobby of the old Boston Museum, where I went once a week to see the play, or the maze of alleys cutting across Cornhill, which I threaded to and from the station. To-day a trolley runs to the North Parish, and what once were back-country roads are now lined with suburban cottages. One farm is a

golf club now! There is a movie theatre where an old Colonial house used to stand by the village green, the village trees have disappeared; the village, in fact, has disappeared. That sophisticated thing, a suburb, has displaced it, and the old democracy between town and country is no more. The present generation is sharply divided, and it is characteristic of the urban element to have very little consciousness that the other still exists. The self-sufficiency of our American cities is rather naïvely amusing, in fact.

Yet we have only to consult the records of the Post Office department to realize what a tremendous number of Americans are in communication with the cities solely by the aid of the Rural Free Delivery. Millions of people live in New York, who nearly perish with the cold on the rare occasions when the thermometer drops to zero. Their newspapers print long stories about it on the front pages. Yet up here in the hills where I live, not a hundred and fifty miles away, we go about our business with the mercury at twenty below—properly dressed for it, of course, which your city dweller never is; and one of our rural mail men, who is a woman, drives her plodding nag twice a day across the bitterly cold flats, wind-swept and drift-piled, carrying the messages from the outer world to the little hamlet under the mountain, cheerful as the chickadees in the evergreens beside the road. She has made that journey twice a day every day for more than

twenty-five years, though sometimes a six-horse sled had to precede her to break the drifts. Scattered along her path are little white houses and big gray barns. In front of each house is a tin mail box on a post or tree. The rattle of her buggy wheels or the jingle of her sleigh-bells down the road proclaims her coming, and even if she bears no mail for the waiting box she bears a greeting and a bit of gossip for the housewife in the door. I see her pass out of our village every day, with her mail bags around her feet, and she seems to me a symbol of the simpler, rural America that was once so close to the consciousness of all of us, and which we are but now beginning to realize must not be allowed to perish or we perish, too, the victims of a top-heavy industrialism and prohibitive food prices.

The Rural Free Delivery marks the outmost extension of our great postal service, and like all institutions on the frontier it is less mechanical and more human than the central portions of the system. In the city post offices, men are machines; mail wagons or motor trucks are juggernauts, letters are shot through tubes and sped toward their destination on trains. But the system is already less impersonal before the rural deliverer receives his pouches and packets. They are often given to him in a small office where familiarity reigns, and the postmaster or mistress peers at you as you enter the door, and has your letters waiting when you reach the little arched window. In such a

post office may be found almost a current history of the village. In the windows are home-made posters announcing a church supper, a high school basket ball game, a political rally. On the bulletin board, and spilling from it out on the adjacent walls, are lost-and-found notices, gloves, hair ribbons, and other trifles picked up on the road and pinned here awaiting an owner, the tax collector's warning, the list of voters, a plea for soldiers to join the United States army, the fish and game laws, a coloured picture of a gypsy moth, and the list of unclaimed letters for the week. Every one in the village comes to the post office, even if only for the reason that brought the old gentleman in Mr. Ade's fable, who went every day because in 1888 he got a seed catalogue. The post office is a social institution and a clearing house for information, no less than a means of distributing mail. It is from such an office that the Rural Delivery man sets out whom we are about to follow. He will take us back into a world which some of us had almost forgotten.

This particular carrier still drives a buggy. Many of his fellows, especially those with long routes in regions where the Winters are not severe nor the dry roads long delayed in Spring, now employ one of those small, cheap automobiles that have been the admiration of the European armies. But our carrier is in a northern mountain region where as yet macadam is almost unknown, and a motor would be impracticable

for more than four or at most five months in the year. He not only delivers along the route, but he carries the mail to the little post office far from the railroad at the end of his journey. That is in a leather sack or two at his feet. The route mail is on the seat beside him, along with a pile of private parcels, purchases he has been commissioned to make by those whom we had almost called his patients. His is an ordinary-looking buggy, and a somewhat less than ordinary-looking horse. He wears no uniform. Yet he and his outfit are mysteriously invested with the dignity of Uncle Sam. He is carrying the United States Mail, and though we call him Tom and have known him familiarly since boyhood, we would not dream of interfering with his journey. Somehow, for us, he represents the coöperative ideal made manifest. He is our servant—and our fellow townsman. To interfere with him would be to interfere with every citizen of the village, of the nation. It is easier to visualize democracy in the form of Tom Sherburn than that of a mail tube to the Grand Central Station!

Tom's buggy jogs down the village street and in under the shadow of the old covered bridge, where the cross planking rattles loudly and there is a curious smell known to every one familiar with old covered bridges, and quite indescribable to anybody else. Inside the bridge are tin posters advertising liniment for man and beast, and up in the cobwebs hang wisps of hay caught from some passing load. Through the little square



windows you catch a momentary glimpse of the brown river and bending willows—a pretty picture in a dusky frame. After the road has crossed the bridge, it follows up the side of the river, rapidly leaving the village behind, taking us toward the hills.

How gracefully the road swings with the curves of the stream, each bend ending one tree-shaded vista, and, once it is passed, beginning another! The brown water is visible always at our side, between the willows, the white birches, the swaying alders that dip their twigs into the rushing water in the Spring. The soil is moist here, and tall meadow rue lines the road. Over the wall and beyond the fringe of trees on the opposite side from the stream are level fields of hay or corn, rich bottom lands with now and then stately vase elms marching across them along the bank of some hidden swale—once, perhaps, the bed of the river. The farmhouses here are prosperous, with big red barns, and the mail boxes are nailed to painted posts close beside the sandy road, with little red flags which are raised straight up in the morning, when mail is to be collected, as a signal to Tom. Nor is there much gossip here when the carrier comes by. The folk on these farms are too busy—and, perhaps, too near the village. It is a well-known law of physics that roadside gossip varies directly with the distance from town.

It is when the road begins to leave the river bottom and wind up the long hill toward the forested plateau

that the farms lose their bustle and Tom pulls his old horse up for a moment under the shade of a big sugar maple, while a leisurely figure in the traditional straw hat comes to the split rail fence, or the stone wall, and holds converse. Has Tom seen a paper that morning? What are them German nuisances up to now? Is it true beans are forty cents a quart? Well, well, and he didn't put in more'n two rows, and might hev put in ten times as many more, seein's how he cut off the poverty birch last winter from the upper pasture and hed the poles, or could hev hed 'em, if he hadn't cut 'em up fer stove wood. What's goin' to be the end of this cost o' things, anyhow? It's gettin' so a man can't afford to buy grain for his cattle, and without no cattle, you ain't got no manure, and without no manure you can't keep up your land—and there you be! Having arrived at this melancholy predicament, and seeing no way out, he gazes across the valley fields below to the rising green wall of the hill beyond, while Tom flecks off a horse fly with his whip and adds his bit of complaint that Uncle Sam ain't raisin' his pay none, either, and the horse costin' more to feed every day.

Either the flick of the whip or the mention of food causes the horse gently to move forward, and, thus reminded, Tom clucks to him and goes on up the road. But he seems quite cheerful when he reaches the last house up the hill, and stops to give Mrs. Sanborn her pound of tea and the bottle of medicine he promised to

get for her when he went by early that morning. Few can be ill along the road without Tom knowing it, and not many without his learning, too, what brand of medicine they are taking. Mrs. Sanborn has cramps, which is an extremely euphonious way of stating a desire for alcoholic stimulation, equally euphoniously supplied by Jamaica ginger. Mrs. Sanborn strongly disapproves of the cider drinking which goes on in the rural regions, especially of the custom, hallowed by tradition, of letting a barrel of hard cider freeze almost solid and then, on a winter night, boring a hole into the heart of the ice cake and extracting the highly stimulating unfrozen core. But Mrs. Sanborn's secret remains comparatively secure with Tom and the village druggist. "Live and let live" is still the motto in a land of individualists.

Tom is generally whistling again by the time he reaches the top of the long trail and enters the deep woods on the summit plateau. But his whistle ceases as the horse's hoofs sound less metallic on the damper ground, or in Autumn swish and thud softly through the fallen leaves. Here in these woods, where the sunlight is dappled gold and there are dim green vistas, Tom likes to drive slowly, enjoying the cool shadows in Summer, the hushed, windless calm in Winter, and only in Spring annoyed by the frost holes and black, mucky ruts. Here he sometimes surprises a deer, which bounds away through the forest, and almost daily a rabbit or two scamper across his path, or a partridge



How gracefully the road swings with the curves of the stream





goes drumming up and whirrs down an evergreen aisle. Tom was a mighty hunter in his younger days, and has never yet forgiven the state legislature for making it illegal for him to go out with a gun on the Sabbath (not, of course, that he doesn't go out with a gun on the Sabbath!). This drive through the woods appeals to some deep instinct within him, and his eyes become keen and youthful. He likes, too, in a less expressive way, the red bunchberries by the road, the bloodroot and hepaticas of Spring, the gentians in the late Summer. He loves the ground pine trailing on the bank, the earthy smell, the distant hammer of a woodpecker, the sweet clarion of a hermit thrush. It seems almost as if such a man, passing daily through this timber with senses alert and instinctive sympathy with nature, might fashion a woodland lyric to the rhythmic plod of his horse's hoofs and the gentle sway of the buggy. So far as we know, however, Tom has never broken into verse. His nearest approach was his statement one day to a summer boarder in the big farmhouse down the hill on the other side.

"I seen the white tail of a deer go boundin' off through the balsams," he said, "like a snowball through a velvet veil."

The forest is, in reality, on the crest of a divide, and when the road emerges on the farther side a splendid prospect opens out. The road plunges abruptly down, past a sentinel pine and over a cascade of thank-you-

marms, into a mountain intervale, an isolated community of little farms which is walled on the farther side by the upspringing green flanks of the major range. From the broader valley where Tom's journey began these mountains had not been visible, hidden by the foothills and the forest plateau. They come into the view with a dramatic suddenness, never quite the same under the changing play of mist and light and cloud-shadow upon them, and never seen, however often, without a secret thrill.

It is frequently twilight, in Winter it may be quite dark, when Tom comes down the last slope into the hamlet which is journey's end. Perhaps a young moon is hanging in the black tracery of the maple boughs and the village lights are golden across the snow. All his packages and letters have been distributed and only the sacks of mail at his feet are left. The usual familiar crowd is awaiting him, in Summer under the porch in front of the store, in Winter around the stove within. The post office is one corner of the "general store," barricaded off by a partition of numbered mail boxes like an artificial bee-hive comb, stood on end, except that it has a little window in the centre through which the postmaster peers. Tom tosses in the mail-sacks over the counter, and warms his hands at the stove, while his neighbours interrogate him regarding the state of the road. There is a curious smell in the store, of kerosene, coffee, grain, tobacco smoke, cotton cloth, bananas,

and newly dampened woollen drying by the stove. Familiar faces come in out of the night; the mail is sorted; you hear the rustle of newspapers; and then the crowd fades away, following Tom who has gone home to put the horse in her stall and get his own supper.

Through Summer and Winter, through storm and shine, the rural carrier drives every morning over that route, and home again every afternoon—twelve miles from this mountain interval to the little town by the railroad, and twelve long miles back again—bringing his messages from the larger world. It is a beautiful road he travels, but it may also be a severe one. The winter winds howl past that sentinel pine where the road breaks out of the forest; the drifts pile deep in the cuts and across the river flats. Tom knows from long experience exactly where he will encounter bare ground and where the snow will suddenly pack into diagonal ridges across the road, some rock or tree or wall splitting the blast, so that his “pung” rides them like a boat on a choppy sea. Yet Tom and his old horse get the mail through. That is what Uncle Sam pays him for, and he harnesses up on a bitter morning, when the thermometer registers twenty below, with no thought of heroism, to make a twelve-mile trip which no automobile on earth could negotiate and which would probably put the average city dweller of to-day into the hospital for a month. In Spring he splashes along through the mud; in the Autumn, when the rains come down from the cloud-

enveloped hills and the trees are lashed by the wind, we still see him jogging past, a humble but a human and a faithful cog in the great machinery of our government, linking up the old, pioneer America with the new.

Nowadays in Summer he often meets automobiles bearing registration numbers of far states, drawn here by the lure of the mountains. But there are none in Winter. They disappear before the white snow-caps on the range have crept down to timber; and by the time the world is on runners, Tom meets most often the sleds of the lumber men hauling the precious timber to the railroad, or bringing out the cord wood which makes the wise farmer independent of coal. Sometimes a load of hay on runners will go by, on its way to some farm where the supply has run low, and then Tom will have to turn out of the single track, nearly upsetting his pung as it dips in the drift, while the driver on top of the hay shouts a "Thank you!" He meets, too, the school barge, bringing in the children to the "centre school," and he has been known to have to dodge snowballs on such occasions. He meets a neighbour, now and then, wrapped up to the ears like himself, and slipping along over the blue-shadowed road with jingling sleigh-bells. But always it is the simple life of the frontier country that he encounters, with its suggestion of a living wrung from the soil and a mode of existence dependent on the earth and its moods of wind and weather. It is not a sign of intellectual poverty that when Tom and a

neighbour meet on the road one of them is almost sure to inquire: "Well, what's it goin' to do to-morrow?" If you had to make a round trip every day over Tom's route, in an open sleigh or buggy, you would ask the same question, with a good bit more anxiety in your tone, too, than he betrays when the northeast winds are piling the storm scud over the peaks of the range and trailing fingers of cloud down the slopes!

I am afraid it is the maintenance of Tom and his kind by the Government which has caused one interesting traveller almost to disappear from the country roads—the itinerant merchant. Some still exist, but they are growing fewer every year, as the great mail-order houses increase their range. I well remember one such merchant of my boyhood. He kept his wagon, between trips, in my grandfather's barn, and he was always familiarly known as "Mr. Wanamaker." This wagon, painted a gay red and yellow, was shaped like a huge box. A lid lifted behind the driver's seat, and disclosed such bulky objects as washboards, boxes of soap, and the like. The back of the wagon, however, was the fascinating part. Climbing out, "Mr. Wanamaker" (whose real name was Lovejoy, and he had ample Burnside whiskers which gave him a most benevolent expression), came around to the rear, like a butcher, and threw open a double door, while the farmer's wife, his daughters, and all and sundry female visitors, as well as the children, gathered in an eager group. Behind the doors,



arranged in the most skilful manner, were all the contents of a well-equipped dry goods store. Everything was there, from the material for a new silk dress to garter elastic and spools of thread (the spools were kept in a tier of little drawers, I remember, which made a bright pattern of colour when pulled out and displayed). There was always much rushing about and snipping of samples when "Mr. Wanamaker" drew near, and then a great matching of these samples against the spools of silk or cotton. His advice was regarded with great deference, I recall, and was always given in measured, judicial tones.

Then there was the tin peddler and ragman, too, who made periodical visits along the country roads. His cart, less spick and span than "Mr. Wanamaker's," was a curious contrivance, box-like in front, with a rack behind in which were stowed the sacks of rags. Behind the driver, like yellow plumes, stuck up a row of new brooms. Smaller whisk brooms dangled from the sides, and shining pans were suspended, also, which flashed in the sun and rattled merrily on the rare occasions when the dejected horse consented to trot. But the tin peddler was no such elegant and eminent Anglo-Saxon person as Mr. Lovejoy. Business with him was conducted purely as business, and his thumb was carefully watched as he weighed the rags on the rusty scales which hung from the back of his wagon, giving a pot or a pan or a broom in exchange.

It was only a year or two ago that I encountered a Wanamaker on wheels, in a sleepy little hamlet in Rhode Island. But it has been many years since I have seen the genuine tin peddler and ragman of my boyhood. Doubtless the rural mail carrier has taken this job away from all such itinerant venders, and a picturesque feature of rural life has almost vanished. But the rural carrier himself still journeys, day in and day out, along thousands of pleasant country roads, through rain and shine, mud and drift, an unsung hero of faithfulness, a link between our modern interdependent industrial society and the simpler life of the pioneer, a reminder for all of us, when we write R. F. D. on a letter, that rural America still exists, and hundreds of thousands of our countrymen are still rural Americans, not "soft," as recent alarmists would have us believe, but hardy from their age-long battle with soil and tree and winter storm. The talk of "softness" emanates from city dwellers. If we were really soft as a nation, at any rate, a large part of our postal service would come to an abrupt halt. No man who was soft could make Tom Sherburn's trip, from January to December.

## CHAPTER XIII

### WEATHER AND THE SKY

IT IS surprising what a large number of us never see the sky, never see it intimately, that is to say, if such a word may be applied to our relations with immensity. Dwellers in cities or towns, travellers of illuminated highways, we never hobnob with Orion or feel the earth ball swinging east below the still procession of the stars. We make our plans for the morrow, when they are dependent on the weather, by consulting not the heavens but the *Herald*. The sunset means little to us, and the sunrise we never see. A high flotilla of little wind clouds on a summer day, a vast Himalaya of cumuli piled against the blue, a scudding cloud-wrack where the moon rides like a golden galleon in a heavy sea, the great downward sweep of the Milky Way, are magnificent handiworks of space we do not know, meaningless and unobserved. Poor bond slaves to our cañon walls and municipal illumination, we yet walk in our pride and have quaint pity for the plainsman, the sailor ringed by the vast horizon, the Yankee farmer who watches the clouds after sunrise, the action of the mist curtain on the mountain side, to see if he shall cut his hay that morning.

Yet those of us who dwell in the open have our pride, too, and our pity for those who do not know how the firmament showeth His handiwork; those to whom the simple question, "Well, what's it going to do to-morrow?" is not fraught with profound importance.

In the old days before the Government took a hand at prophecy and gave its weather reports each day to the papers, every rural community boasted its own "weather prophet," who read the heavens for signs and very often displayed an uncanny shrewdness in prediction. Such a one was Levi Beebe, who lived on Beartown Mountain in western Massachusetts and whose fame is still perpetuated by a tablet beside the Berkshire County street railroad. These old-time prophets shared, of course, in the common weather lore of the countryside, some of it borrowed from the Indians, some of it no doubt brought from England by the early colonists, but still more of it the slow accumulation of rural American observers. Not a little of it persists to this day, and the farther back you get into the country, the larger it bulks in the speech, even in the belief of the natives. Was there ever an American boy who did not learn that,

Mackerel sky

Never leaves the earth dry?

Is there a country child, even to-day, who does not hope to see the new moon over his right shoulder, which

will bring him good luck, and, if he makes a wish, will cause that wish to come true, especially if it is a wish for money and is accompanied by the jingling of some loose change in the pocket? The moon, indeed, is vastly important. Not only was it once supposed that all crops, especially onions and beans, did better when planted in the old of the moon (the beans, otherwise, as I recall, would run to vine), but even in this day of popularized science you will hear farmers say, as they look at the young crescent: "It's goin' to be a dry month," or "It's goin' to be a wet month." In the city you will never see the new moon; some tall building will always hide it. But in the country, as the sunset glow is dying out, as the bird songs are hushed and the night insects have not begun their antiphonal chorus, in "the still-time of the world," you will suddenly become aware in the west of that sweetly curved, golden crescent, dropping down, perhaps, into a feathery treetop, or hung over quiet water, or poised on the tip of a pointed fir. It was "an old Injun sign" that if you can hang your powder horn on the new moon, it is going to be a dry month. If you can't, it will be a wet one. Doubtless this superstition goes back to some primitive belief that rains come from the moon. If the crescent were tipped up enough to hold the powder horn on one point, it meant the crescent would hold water, too. Otherwise the water would spill out. Though nowadays this primitive prediction



is made with a smile, as I listened to the farmer who made it I have more than once been reminded of a little cousin of mine who stoutly affirmed there were no fairies, but when she went to "Peter Pan" she applauded as loudly as any Miss Adams's appeal for all who believed in fairies to clap their hands.

"But I thought you didn't believe in fairies," said her mother.

"I don't," she answered. "But I don't want Tinker Bell to die."

The skipper of the *Hesperus* was wise to another belief about moon signs.

Last night the moon had a silver ring,  
To-night no moon we see.

Therefore, he argued, they were in for a storm, and events certainly proved him right. It has always been a common belief that a ring around the moon portends bad weather, and it used to be further added that the number of stars visible inside the moon ring indicate the number of days before the storm will come. There is a good deal of sense to this belief, of course, for the ring means thick atmosphere, and the thicker it is the fewer stars will be visible inside the ring (or, for that matter, anywhere else!). The moon ring is still used by country weather prophets as a basis of prediction, and in this past winter I have several times seen it prove a reliable prognosticator of snow.

When the moon is riding high and small through a driving cloud-wrack, the farmer on his way in from his last trip to the barn pauses to contemplate it, and is aware of the curious alternation of moonlight and shadow over the landscape, almost like slow lightning flashes indefinitely prolonged. The distant fields, the timbered mountain side, come into dim view, and then slowly they are obliterated again as a dark cloud sweeps across the moon, and the world seems to shiver. Then the farmer says to himself:

Open and shet  
Is a sign of wet,

and looks, perhaps, to see if the spout is adjusted over the rain barrel, or thinks of the hay he had to leave out in the field.]

Whether "open and shet" is a sign of wet depends, of course, on the quality of the clouds and the direction of the wind, and to read these more intricate signs aright was the province once of the weather prophets. That they could tell so unerringly, as many of them often did, whether the clouds were "wind clouds" or were shredded off from some storm that would not advance farther; whether they threatened actual precipitation or whether changes of temperature were due which would alter the meteorological conditions, was truly a remarkable proof of their powers of observation and deduction. I once knew an old woman who lived

under the shadow of the White Mountains, and whose instinct for weather changes was almost uncanny. She did not have barometrical bones, either, as so many old people maintain they have. Her deductions were all based on observation. Once, I recall, she was taking in some clothes from the line, at ten o'clock at night—a still, starlit night without a cloud. I saw her shadow bobbing about, huge and fantastic, on the barn wall, thrown from the lantern she carried in her left hand, and went out to ask her why she took the clothes in.

“There wa’n’t a cloud in the sky all day,” she said, “and to-night the mountain’s talkin’.”

I listened carefully, and sure enough in the silence I could hear, three thousand feet above us, the steady rush of wind through the stunted spruce forest at timber line. Up there the wind was roaring, then! I thought of Martineau’s words, that the noisy hurricane rushes silently through the upper spaces where there is nothing to oppose it—that force by itself is silent. There seemed to me something almost Celtic, too, in this old Yankee woman’s imagery. And her prediction proved correct: the next day came a deluge.

In this connection, I wonder how many boys used to do what we lads did twenty-five years ago in eastern Massachusetts. We would lay our ears to the telegraph poles, and if “the wires were buzzing,” as we put it, we felt sure we were in for bad weather. This

quaint superstition could not have had an ancient origin, surely, for the telegraph is a nineteenth-century creation. Yet it is equally certain that we did not invent the superstition for ourselves. It was handed down to us from our elders.

Akin to the saying that "open and shet is a sign of wet" is the ancient saw that if you can see enough blue sky to make a pair of Dutchman's breeches, it is going to clear up. I have found this saying almost universally familiar to young and old, in various parts of the country. How well I remember, in my childhood, the wide divergences of opinion which used to develop between my parents and me regarding the exact amount of material required for a Dutchman's nether garments! Standing at the western windows, or on the veranda, I would gaze hopefully at the cloud dome overhead, looking for a rift, and when one appeared I would rush to my mentors with the information. It did no good to look for it in the east, for unless the west cleared my father affirmed that no dependence could be placed even on the bluest sky. Dragging my parents back to the window, I would point to my rift of blue and triumphantly affirm that it would make at least six pairs of breeches, only to be told that I hadn't the most rudimentary knowledge of Dutch fashions. Before I was allowed to venture forth on my fishing trip or hunting expedition, it seems to me now that acres of blue had to be revealed

through the parting cloud-wrack. Never did proverb have a more annoying flexibility of interpretation than that one!

The farmer, the dweller in the open, rises early and looks at once to the sky. Quite aside from any material considerations, indeed, the weather to such of us seems of as much importance as the temper of our companions, and almost as intimate. We look at the thermometer as soon as we descend the stairs, just as we look at it the last thing before going to bed. We gaze at the eastern horizon, at the portent of the sky, and often take our mood therefrom. We step out, perhaps, to see if the "cobwebs" are on the grass, or if there has been a heavy dew (both prophecies to the weather wise), and in the freshness of the new-waked world we lift our heads to the great dome of the sky—felt only as a dome when the eye can rove the full horizon—and see there the little flecks and streamers of cloud, touched rosy by the sun, which has not yet chased the shadows from the world about our feet, riding to meet the dawn. The sun heaves up above the world rim, the shiver of night chill suddenly departs as the long, golden rays stream over the mountains and across the valley to our feet, the birds redouble their song, and looking aloft again we see the army of little white clouds, like spirits of the night, vanishing mysteriously as if they melted into the blue.



Such is the dawning of a fair summer day. But there are other mornings when the clouds hang heavier, low in the heavens, and those of us who are not weather wise are in doubt, asking the first neighbour we meet, "Well, what's it going to do to-day?" Invariably, then, both questioner and questioned come to a pause, and both lift their faces to study the sky, once more aware of it as something near and intimate. If the sun goes into a cloud soon after rising, or if the day starts fair and rapidly "clouds up," we are told that the rain is certain to arrive, and most of us have come by experience to believe the saying. Connected with this bit of weather lore, of course, is the familiar rhyme:

Rainbow in the morning,  
Sailors take warning;  
Rainbow at night,  
Sailors delight;  
Rainbow at noon,  
Rain very soon.

Another early morning sign to look for is the action of the cattle. If they lie down as soon as they are turned out to pasture, they are supposed to feel rheumatic weariness in their bones, like the old folk, due to an approaching storm. However, this superstition about the cattle is not confined alone to their early morning actions. If at any time of the day the cows are seen lying down some one is sure to say: "It's going to rain." But the true weather prophets



Some naked tree stands out in startling, lacy silhouette



know that only in the early hours of the day is the sign significant.

(Parenthetically, we might suggest that a delightful essay is yet to be written on Bones as a Barometer. Almost every family has at least one member who feels the coming of bad weather "in his bones," the fact that rheumatism is now known to be a muscular complaint having no effect on the hallowed phraseology. And in my boyhood there was not a village so small but it boasted a veteran whose honourable bullet wound throbbed at the approach of a storm.)

During the day there are a thousand signs to observe, if you are wise in weather lore, quite too numerous to mention here. There is, for instance, the whirlwind, a little spiral of dust and dry leaves, which so often springs up mysteriously and goes waltzing across a road or a field. If it revolves from right to left the weather will continue fair, but if it revolves the other way rain will soon follow. Then, too, if you see the sheep feeding more eagerly than usual, look out for rain, or if the frogs are jumping with unwonted liveliness in the meadows. If the chimney swallows flock high and dart about excitedly, watch for thunder showers or high wind, while if the barn swallows fly very low, rain is coming. If it is already raining, watch the chickens. If they stay under cover the storm will not last long. If, however, they go out into the yard or runway, in spite of the wetting, the storm may be

expected to continue for some time. Evidently the theory here is that they say to themselves: "Oh, what's the use? It's going to last all day"—and plunge out into the rain.

The heavens, too, must be constantly observed. Select a single cloud for observation, and if it grows larger, that is a bad sign. If it diminishes, fair weather may be expected. On the other hand, it is very suspicious if the sky is absolutely cloudless all day. (Perhaps there is a hint of Puritan pessimism in this belief; nothing so perfect can long endure in this vale of tears!) Again, watch the direction the clouds are taking, or keep an eye on the vane, and if the wind is backing around into the fair weather, quarter don't let it deceive you. It has to go around into the west by the full route before fair weather can be hoped for.

When sunset comes, the summer boarders go out on the pasture knoll to rhapsodize, the farmer scans the west carefully to predict therefrom to-morrow's weather. A red sun ball means a hot day coming. If the westering sun is "drawing water," look out for rain. Drawing water, perhaps we should explain, is the Yankee phrase to describe the shining of the sun through distant clouds so that it sends down fanlike ribs of light toward the horizon. As a matter of fact, it is a bad sign in general if the sun sets in a cloud. Certain other sunsets are portentous of cold, perhaps because they look so cold. It is chiefly in Winter that the sun



sinks through a belt of pure, cool amber, leaving a still cooler green above which melts into the night sky. Against this western light some naked tree will stand out in startling, lacy, silhouette, disclosing all the intricate beauty of its limbs but looking chill enough the while. Such a sunset, for all its loveliness, makes us turn gratefully to the red window squares in the house behind and sniff the pungent smell of wood smoke from the chimney. In Autumn, and more rarely in Summer, when we see such a sunset we exclaim: "It's going to be a cold day to-morrow!"—and generally it is.

After sunset, the stars, as well as the moon, may still tell you something of the weather. A neighbour of mine who used to be an almost unerring weather prophet—till he began taking the Federal weather map and tried to predict scientifically, since when he has been flagrantly unreliable and has lost his former delightful assurance—used to startle me sometimes on a vivid, starry night by gazing up into the spangled sky, through an opening between our elms, and wisely affirming that to-morrow the wind would be southeast (a southeast wind meaning rain). Time after time his prophecy was fulfilled, to my admiration and wonder. Finally he let me into the secret. He always made the prediction when the southeast branch of the milky way could be plainly seen, in its great downward swoop. After all, then, his lore was the same as the common

saying that a day of unusual atmospheric clarity means foul weather ahead, for our rainstorms come so generally from the southeast that he was nearly always safe in his boastful little flourish about the direction of the wind, put on to increase my admiration. The weather sharps in old South County, Rhode Island, have a similarly mysterious method of prediction. Looking out across the blue water to the line where it meets the paler sky, on a brilliant, cloudless day, they mournfully predict rain, and shake their heads when you ask for an explanation. The prediction is always based, however, on the fact that Block Island can be seen with unusual distinctness. I don't know what the percentage of error is, but many Summers have taught me that it is extremely low.

Old South County! The mere name calls to my mind the pictures of wide horizons and a great, blue, doming sky, an "inverted bowl" so spacious that not even Omar could feel "cooped" or compelled to "crawl" beneath it, and out over the sea to the eastward, in the level light of afternoon, cloud ships of pearl and sea-shell pink riding peacefully at anchor. How good it is for the soul to look into those deep-sea spaces, those leagues of upper air! How good it is for the soul to look out into the open, anywhere, when the world is still and the heavens imminent and familiar! I love to go out to a point of vantage in our mountain valley and watch the snow-storm coming, wiping out the distant summits first with

its great white battle smoke, the upper edges of its clouds feathery and vague so that they melt into the silver gray sky, and then pushing on to our nearer peaks, and finally sweeping down upon us and hurling in our faces the first cool, stinging shot of its beneficent shrapnel. I love to watch some great thunderhead, dark as a cannon's mouth, mass behind a steep, wooded mountain wall, a cloud with an ominous glitter in its sharply defined edges, edges so sharp at first that they would seem almost cut out of sheet metal and laid against the blue were it not for the fact that we are aware of the immense aerial perspective behind them, between the thunderhead and the roof of the sky. Against such a cloud an ancient white birch will often stand out with startling distinctness, like a white lightning stab. The vast mass seems to swell and grow from within itself. The ominously glittering rim moves up toward the sun, crosses it, wipes half the light off the landscape; and then suddenly, from the underside, comes the white mist of the rain, obliterates the distant mountains, walks down their slopes, marches up the valley, and we dash for shelter, getting under the cover of veranda or barn, perhaps, just as the great drops hit the drive, kicking up little puffs of dust.

I love—and only too well, I fear—to sit in my garden summer house, forgetful of the task before me, and gaze out on a summer day over the beds where the bees are busy in the blue veronica and the goldfinches are sway-

ing in the cosmos, to the doming hardwoods on the hill beyond, which throw their leafy outlines against the lower slopes of vast mountain ranges, mighty Himalayas robed in eternal snow but with no terror in their billowy ravines—the ethereal heights of the cumuli. A great, snowy, pink-tipped cumulus cloud above a doming green hill, rising into the blue of the summer sky, the hum of bees, the scent of flowers, and far off, perhaps, the sweet shrill of children at play—who for such a picture would not neglect his work? Who, indeed, but would let even his imagination grow languid, and if Hamlet were to say: “It is very like a camel,” would reply: “By the mass, and ’tis like a camel, indeed”; and when he said: “Or like a whale?” would answer quite as cheerfully: “Very like a whale.” After all, camel or whale or Mount Everest—what does it matter? It is a great white cloud on a summer day!

But it is when we leave the city abruptly, where we have scarcely been aware of moon or stars, sunsets or sunrisings, and go into camp, perhaps, on the shore of some forest lake, or on the shoulder of a mountain, that we become most startlingly aware of the importance of the weather and the beauty and familiarity of the sky. What camper rising in the night to poke a dying fire, or waking on the ground with unaccustomed aches, has not looked up in sudden astonishment to the vault of stars, amazed at their number and aware, too, with a strange, new sensitiveness, that they are shedding a

perceptible radiance around him which he had never detected on his electrically illumined pavements? What camper on the mountain side, as he turned over on his back and looked up, nothing in his field of vision but the spire of a stunted spruce and the great garden of the stars, has failed to sense with something akin to awe the eastward swing of the earth ball, a sense so sharp sometimes that all the stars seem the torches of a great procession marching by the other way, far aloft in the midnight? It is at such moments that the little cares and perplexities and ambitions of our human life seem most to fall away, to shrink into insignificance, and we feel new springs of power pouring in from the silent places; or, at the very least, we wonder if, after all, the life which is lived close to the earth and the sky, the waters and mountains, however lowly it may be, does not hold something we have lost in our hurry, our herding, our unrest. It is well thus to sit in humbleness now and again at the feet of Orion.



## CHAPTER XIV

### OLD BOATS

ANYTHING which man has hewn from stone or shaped from wood, put to the uses of his pleasure or his toil, and then at length abandoned to crumble slowly back into its elements of soil or metal, is fraught for the beholder with a wistful appeal, whether it be the pyramids of Egyptian kings, or an abandoned farmhouse on the road to Moosilauke, or only a rusty hay-rake in a field now overgrown with golden-rod and Queen Anne's lace, and fast surrendering to the returning tide of the forest. A pyramid may thrill us by its tremendousness; we may dream how once the legions of Mark Antony encamped below it, how the eagles of Napoleon went tossing past. But in the end we shall reflect on the toiling slaves who built it, block upon heavy block, to be a monarch's tomb, and on the monarch who now lies beneath (if his mummy has not been transferred to the British Museum). The old gray house by the roadside, abandoned, desolate, with a bittersweet vine entwined around the chimney and a raspberry bush pushing up through the rotted doorsill,

takes us back to the days when the pioneer's axe rang in this clearing, hewing the timbers for beam and rafter, and the smoke of the first fire went up that ample flue. How many a time have I paused in my tramping to poke around such a ruin, reconstructing the vanished life of a day when the cities had not sucked our hill towns dry and this scrubby wilderness was a productive farm!

The motor cars go through the Berkshires in steady procession by the valley highways, past great estates betokening our changed civilization. But the back roads of Berkshire are known to few, and you may tramp all the morning over the Beartown Mountain plateau, by a road where the green grass grows between the ruts, without meeting a motor, or, indeed, a vehicle of any sort. A century ago Beartown was a thriving community, producing many thousand dollars' worth of grain, maple sugar, wool, and mutton. To-day there are less than half a dozen families left, and they survive by cutting cord wood from the sheep pastures! We must haul our wool from the Argentine, and our mutton from Montana, while our own land goes back to unproductive wilderness. As the road draws near the long hill down into Monterey, there stands a ruined house beside it, one of many ruins you will have passed, the plaster in heaps on the floor, the windows gone, the door half fallen from its long, hand-wrought hinges. It is a house built around a huge central chimney, which seems still

as solid as on the day it was completed. The rotted mantels were simply wrought, but with perfect lines, and the panelling above them was extremely good. So was the delicate fanlight over the door, in which a bit of glass still clings, iridescent now like oil on water. Under the eaves the carpenter had indulged in a Greek border, and over the woodshed opening behind he had spanned a keystone arch. Peering into this shed, under the collapsing roof, you see what is left of an axe embedded in a pile of reddish vegetable mould, which was once the chopping block. Peering through the windows of the house, you see a few bits of simple furniture still inhabiting the ruined rooms. Just outside, in the doorway, the day lilies, run wild in the grass, speak to you of a housewife's hand across the vanished years. The barn has gone completely, overthrown and wiped out by the advancing forest edge. Enough of the clearing still remains, however, to show where the cornfields and the pastures lay. They are wild with berry stalks and flowers now, still and vacant under the Summer sun.

The ruins of war are melancholy, and raise our bitter resentment. Yet how often we pass such an abandoned farm as this without any realization that it, too, is a ruin of war, the ceaseless war of commercial greed. No less surely than in stricken Belgium has there been a deportation here. Factories and cities have swallowed up a whole population, indeed, along the Beartown road. It is easy to say that they went willingly, that they pre-

ferred the life of cities; that the dreary tenement under factory grime, with a "movie" theatre around the corner, is an acceptable substitute to them for the ample fireplaces, the fanlight door, the rolling fields and roadside brook. We hear much discussion in New England to-day of "how to keep the young folks on the farm." But why should they stay on the farm, to toil and starve, in body and mind? We have so organized our whole society on a competitive commercial basis that they can now do nothing else. Those ancient apple trees beside the ruined house once grew fruit superior in taste to any apple which ever came from Hood River or Wenatchee, and could grow it again; but greed has determined that our cities shall pay five cents apiece for the showy western product, and the small individual grower of the East is helpless. We have raised individualism to a creed, and killed the individual. We have exalted "business," and depopulated our farms. The old gray ruin on the back road to Monterey is an epitome of our history for a hundred years.

But to pursue such reflections too curiously would take our mind from the road, our eyes from the wild flower gardens lining the way—the banks of blueberries fragrant in the sun, the stately borders of meadow rue where the grassy track dips down through a moist hollow. And to pursue such reflections too curiously would take us far afield from the spot we planned to reach when we took up our pen for this particular

journey. That spot was the bit of sandy lane, just in front of Cap'n Bradley's house in old South County, Rhode Island. The lane leads down from the colonial Post Road to the shore of the Salt Pond, and the Cap'n's house is the first one on the left after you leave the road. The second house on the left is inhabited by Miss Maria Mills. The third house on the left is the Big House, where they take boarders. The Big House is on the shore of the Salt Pond. There are no houses on the right of the lane, only fields full of bay and huckleberries. The lane runs right out on a small pier and apparently jumps off the end into whatever boat is moored there, where it hides away in the hold, waiting to be taken on a far journey to the yellow line of the ocean beach, or the flag-marked reaches of the oyster bars. It is a delightful, leisurely little lane, a by-way into another order from the modernized macadam Post Road where the motors whiz. You go down a slight incline to the Cap'n's house, and the motors are shut out from your vision. From here you can glimpse the dancing water of the Salt Pond, and smell it, too, when the wind is south, carrying the odour of gasolene the other way. The Cap'n's house is painted brown, a little, brown dwelling with blue-legged sailor men on poles in the dooryard, revolving in the breeze. The Cap'n is a little brown man, for that matter. He is reconciled to a life ashore by his pipe and his pension, and by his lookout built of weathered timber on a grass-



covered sand drift just abaft the kitchen door, whither he betakes himself with his spy glass on clear days to see whether it is his old friend Cap'n Perry down there on number two oyster bar, or how heavy the traffic is to-day far out beyond the yellow beach line, where Block Island rises like a blue mirage.

Cap'n Bradley boasts a garden, too. It is just across the lane from his front door. There are three varieties of flowers in it—nasturtiums, portulacas, and bright red geraniums. The portulacas grow around the border, then come the nasturtiums, and finally the taller geraniums in the centre. The Cap'n has never seen nor heard of those ridiculous wooden birds on green shafts which it is now the fashion to stick up in flower beds, but he has something quite appropriate, and, all things considered, quite as "artistic." In the bow of his garden, astride a spar, is a blue-legged sailor man ten inches tall, keeping perpetual lookout up the lane. For this flower bed is planted in an old dory filled with earth. She had outlived her usefulness down there in the Salt Pond, or even, it may be, out on the blue sea itself, but no vandal hands were laid upon her to stave her up for kindling wood. Instead, the Captain himself painted her a bright yellow, set her down in front of his dwelling, and filled her full of flowers. She is disintegrating slowly; already, after a rain, the muddy water trickles through her sides and stains the yellow paint. But what a pretty and peaceful process! She might not strike you

as a happy touch set down in one of those formal gardens depicted in *The House Beautiful* or *Country Life*, but here beside the salty lane past Cap'n Bradley's door, gaudy in colour, with her load of homely flowers and her quaint little sailor man astride his spar above the bright geraniums, she is perfect. No boat could come to a better end. She's taking portulacas to the Islands of the Blest!

Miss Maria Mills, in the next house, never followed the sea, and her idea of a garden is more conventional. She grows hollyhocks beside the house, and sweet peas on her wire fence. But at the lane's end, where the water of the Salt Pond laps the pier, you may see another old boat put to humbler uses, now that its seafaring days are over, and uses sometimes no less romantic than the Cap'n's garden. It is a flat-bottomed boat, and lies bottom side up just above the little beach made by the lap of the waves, for the tide does not affect the Salt Pond back here three miles from the outlet. The paint has nearly gone from this aged craft, though a few flakes of green still cling under the gunwales. But in place of paint there have appeared an incredible number of initials, carved with every degree of skill or clumsiness, over bottom and sides. This boat is the bench whereon you wait for the launch to carry you down the Pond, for the catboat or thirty-footer to be brought in from her moorings, for Cap'n Perry to land with a load of oysters; or it is the bench you sit upon to

watch the sunset glow behind the pines on the opposite headland, the pines where the blue herons roost, or to see the moon track on the dancing water. The Post Road is alive with motors now, far into the evening. You get your mail from the little post office beside it as quickly as possible—which isn't very quickly, to be sure, for we do not hurry in South County, even when we are employed by Uncle Sam—and then you turn down the quiet lane, past the Cap'n's garden, toward the lap of quiet water and the salty smell. Affairs of State are now discussed, of a summer evening, upon the bottom of this upturned boat, while a case knife dulled by oyster shells picks out a new initial. And when the fate of the nation is settled, or to-morrow's weather thoroughly discussed (the two are of about equal importance to us in South County, with the balance in favour of the weather), and the debaters have departed to bed, some of them leaving by water with a rattle of tackle or, more often in these degenerate days, the *put, put* of an unmuffled exhaust, then other figures come to the upturned boat, speaking softly or not at all, and in the morning you may, perhaps, find double initials freshly cut, with a circle sentimentally enclosing them. So the old craft passes her last days beside the lapping water, a pleasant and a useful end.

On the other side of the Big House from the pier, at the head of a tiny dredged inlet, there is an old boat-house. It seems but yesterday that we used to warp

the *Idler* in there when summer was over, get the chains under her, and block her up for the winter. She spent the winter on one side of the slip; the *Sea Mist*, a clumsy craft that couldn't stir short of a half gale, spent the winter on the other side. Over them, on racks, the rowboats were slung. There was a larger boathouse for the big fellows. What busy days we spent in May or June, caulking and scraping and painting, splicing and repairing, making the little *Idler* ready for the sea again! She was an eighteen-foot cat, a bit of a tub, I fear, but the best on the Pond in her day, eating up close into the wind, sensitive, alert, with a pair of white heels she had shown to many a larger craft. Surely it was but yesterday that I rowed out to her where she was moored a hundred feet from shore, climbed aboard, hoisted sail, and, with my pipe drawing sweetly, sat down beside the tiller and played out the sheet till the sail filled, there was a crack and snaffle of straining tackle, the boat leaped forward, the tiller batted my ribs, the *Idler* heeled over, and then quietly, softly, as rhythmic as a song, the water raced hissing along her rail, the little waves slapped beneath her bow—and the world was good to be alive in! Surely it was but yesterday that the white sail of the *Idler* was like a gull's wing on the Pond!

But the white sail wings are few on the Pond to-day, and the *Idler* lies on her side in the weeds behind the

boathouse. She had to make room for the motor craft. She is too bulky for a flower bed, too convex for a bench. Her paint is nearly gone now, both the yellow body colour and the pretty green and white stripe along her rail that we used to put on with such care. Her seams are yawning, and the rain water pool that at first settled on the low side of her cockpit has now seeped through, and a little deposit of soil has accumulated, in which a sickly weed is growing. Poor old *Idler* ! One day I got an axe, resolved to break her up, but when it came to the point of burying the first blow my resolution failed. I thought of all the hours of enthusiastic labour I had spent upon those eighteen feet of oak ribs and planking; I thought of all the thrilling hours of the race, when we had squeezed her into the wind past Perry's Point and saved a precious tack; I thought of the dreamy hours when she had borne us down the Pond in the summer sunshine, or through the gray, mysterious fog, or under the stars above the black water. So, instead, I laid my hand gently on her rotting tiller, and then took the axe back to the woodshed. She will never ride the waves again, but she shall dissolve into her elements peacefully, in sight of the salt water, in the quiet grass behind the boathouse.

It seems to me that all my life I have had memories of old boats. One of my earliest recollections is of *Old Ironsides*, in the Charlestown Navy Yard, dismantled



and decked over, but saved from destruction by Dr. Holmes's poem. What thrilling visions it awoke to climb aboard her and tread her decks! Acres of spinnaker and topgallants broke out aloft, cannon boomed, smoke rolled, "grape and cannister" flew through the air, chain shot came hurtling, and the Stars and Stripes waved through it all, triumphant. The white iron-clads out in the channel (for in those days they were white) evoked no such visions. Another memory is of a childhood trip to New Bedford and a long walk for hours by the water front, out on green and rotting piers where chunky, square-rigged whalers, green and rotting, too, were moored alongside. The life of the whaler was in those days something infinitely fascinating to us boys. We read of the chase, the hurling of the harpoon, the mad ride over the waves towed by the plunging monster. And here were the very ships which had taken the brave whalers to the hunting grounds, here on their decks were some of the whale boats which had been towed over the churned and blood-flecked sea! Why should they be green and rotting now? They produced upon me an impression of infinite sadness. It seemed as if a great hand had suddenly wiped a romantic bloom off my vision of the world.

But it was not long after that I knew the romance of a launching. It was at Kennebunkport in Maine. All summer the ship yards on either side of the river,

close to the little town and under the very shadow of the white meeting house steeple, had rung with the blows of axe and hammer. The great ribs rose into place, the sheathing went on, the decks were laid, the masts stepped; finally the first rigging was adjusted. After the workmen left in the late afternoon, we boys swarmed over the ships—three-masters, smelling deliciously of new wood and caulking, and played we were sailors. When the rope ladders were finally in place, we raced up and down them, sitting in the crow's nest on a line with the church weather vane, and pretending to reef the sails. It was an event when the ships were launched. The tide was at the flood, gay canoes filled the stream along both banks, hundreds of people massed on the shore. A little girl stood in the bow with a bottle of wine on a string. An engine tooted, cables creaked, and down the greased ways slid the ship, with a dip and a heave when she hit the water that made big waves on either side and set the canoes to rocking madly, while the crowd cheered and shouted. After the launching, the schooners were towed out to sea, and down the coast, to be fitted elsewhere. We boys followed them in canoes as far as the breakwater, and watched them disappear. Soon their sails would be set, and they would join the white adventurers out there on the world rim.

Where are they now, I wonder? Are they still buffeting the seas, or do they lie moored and outmoded

beside some green wharf, their days of usefulness over? I remember hoping, as I watched them pass out to sea, that they would not share the fate of the unknown craft which lay buried in the sands a mile down the coast. It was said that she came ashore in the "Great Storm" of 1814 (or thereabouts). Nothing was left of her in our day but her sturdy ribs, which thrust up a few feet above the sand, outlining her shape, and were only visible at low water. On a stormy day, when the seas were high, I used to stand at the head of the beach and try to picture how she drove up on the shore, shuddering deliciously as each great wave came pounding down on all that was left of her oaken frame. When I read in the newspaper of a wreck I thought of her, and I think of her to this day on such occasions, thrusting up black and dripping ribs above the wet sands at low water, or vanishing beneath the pounding foam of the breakers.

If you take the shore line train from Boston to New York, you pass through a sleepy old town in Connecticut where a spur track with rusty rails runs out to the wharves, and moored to these wharves are side-wheel steamers which once plied the Sound. It served somebody's purpose or pocket better to discontinue the line, and with its cessation and the cessation of work in the ship yards close by, the old town passed into a state of salty somnolence. The harbour is glassy and still, opening out to the blue waters of the

Sound. Still are the white steamers by the wharves, where once the gang planks shook with the tread of feet and the rumble of baggage trucks. Many a time, as the train paused at the station, I have watched the black stacks for some hint of smoke, hoping against hope that I should see the old ship move, and turn, and go about her rightful seafaring. But it was never to be. There were only ghosts in engine room and pilot house. Like the abandoned dwelling on the upland road to Monterey, these steamers were mute witnesses to a vanished order. But always as the train pulled out from the station I sat on the rear platform and watched the white town and the white steamers and the glassy harbour slip backward into the haze—and it seemed as if that haze was the gentle breath of oblivion.

I live inland now, far from the smell of salt water and the sight of sails. Yet sometimes there comes over me a longing for the sea as irresistible as the lust for salt which stampedes the reindeer of the north. I must gaze on the unbroken world-rim, I must feel the sting of spray, I must hear the rhythmic crash and roar of breakers and watch the sea-weed rise and fall where the green waves lift against the rocks. Once in so often I must ride those waves with cleated sheet and tugging tiller, and hear the soft hissing song of the water on the rail. And “my day of mercy” is not complete till I have seen some old boat, her seafaring done,

heeled over on the beach or amid the fragrant sedges, a mute and wistful witness to the romance of the deep, the blue and restless deep where man has adventured in craft his hands have made since the earliest sun of history, and whereon he will adventure, ardently and insecure, till the last syllable of recorded time.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE LAND BELOW THE RIVER BANK

OUR little northern river winds along through the Berkshire intervalles, polluted with many a mill and sewer near its source, but running clear again when it breaks into the country south of the Taconics, a pretty stream when glimpsed from road or railway, a binding thread for our mountain landscape, but known aright, after all, only to those who launch boat or canoe upon it, who get down into the land below the bank.

It is a different world, this land below the river bank, with different inhabitants, a different quality of landscape, a sense of strangeness perpetually alluring, and a sweet, peaceful mood of languid solitude. You are oddly shut in on the river, alike by high banks and bounding trees, and by your angle of vision, which is lowered many feet from the accustomed. Thus you gain an intimacy with your immediate surroundings, a friendliness with the landscape, elsewhere impossible. When you leave your canoe at the end of your idle afternoon and climb the bank, the sense of transition is sometimes almost startling. Six steps up from water-

way to footway, and you are in another order. Almost you hear different sounds. Certainly you smell different odours, see different flowers, and your range of vision expands to its accustomed horizon. So the land below the river bank forever retains its charm of a shy, secluded personality that must be sought, and one which is therefore comparatively unknown.

Our river twists and turns through the rich sandy loam of the flat Canaan plains, running more than ten miles between two towns that are but six miles apart by road, and dropping but eighteen inches in the entire distance. It averages, perhaps, one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet across. You might not suppose, to see its quiet brown water mirroring the banks, that the current would ever be strong enough to alter the bed. But in Spring the freshets come down till the water level often rises six feet or more, overflowing the banks and lopping off in the course of a few years an acre on one side of a bend, to deposit it on the other side farther down the stream. If land values were higher in this valley, there might be pretty chances for litigation! One of the first interests the river awakes is this of the shifting current.

The bottom meadows, varying in width from two or three miles to less than a quarter of a mile, are flanked by wooded mountain walls, dome after dome, with here and there a pasture running up the slope into the timber. Where the meadow joins the high land on either side are

parallel roads down the valley, the West Road and the East Road, studded with small gray farmhouses and large gray barns. From either road you see the meadows, now soft and rippling with oats, now golden brown where the hay has been cut, now green with pastures, or just gone wild and tinted with the white of Queen Anne's lace, the primrose yellow of our Berkshire shrubby cinquefoil (which the farmers here wrongly call hardhack), the pretty pink of Bouncing Bet, and at rare intervals the flame of Devil's paint brush. Always, through the meadows, you are aware of the river, its water seldom seen, but its course clearly marked by the winding procession of stately elms and shimmering willows. Strike off through the meadows now, and presently, as you draw nearer the stream, you see the grayish brown half circle of the exposed bank, where the current has devoured a hundred yards of trees and eaten on into the cultivated fields. Across from this exposed bank is a tongue of beach, almost its exact convex, though a little sharper, and rapidly growing up with verdure. But it is characteristic of our river that almost all such acute bends are followed by one, two, or three more. The current, thrown sharply off at an angle, eats into the shore at the point to which it is deflected as well as at the point of deflection, and then repeats the operation till it has sometimes almost doubled on its tracks. From the point where we stand a second exposed bank is visible beyond that

feathery pile of willows, and to the left still another, almost as close to us as the first, so that this tongue of meadow here is like a peninsula.

We enter a canoe—a canoe because it slips noiselessly through the water, and can go almost anywhere—and examine the river bank more closely, with quite a new impression of its size here on the surface of the water, where it towers six feet above us and shuts out all but the tops of the mountains. It is composed of compact layers of loamy sand, with here and there a little slippery clay. The constant erosion of the water at freshet time has hollowed it out beneath the surface soil, and the grass and flowers, holding together the surface overhang by tenacious roots, curve out and droop along the top like peat thatching. Each Spring great chunks of this overhang break away and fall into the water, as the river continues to deepen the bend. Under this thatch, looking quaintly like a street of Upper West Side apartment houses, are the dark little holes of the bank swallows, row after row of them, neatly tunnelled into the damp brown earth. The swallows skim low over the surrounding fields, snapping up insects as they fly, or come home unerringly to their abodes and disappear with a flutter of tail. The nests are so exactly similar in appearance that one marvels at the birds' discrimination. It is fortunate, certainly, that sobriety is one of their virtues. Now and then among the swallows' cliff dwellings is a larger hole, where dog or woodchuck or

predatory rat has burrowed, hunting, perhaps, for eggs.

The complementary tongue of land which is always formed by the river opposite one of these concave sweeps of exposed bank is no less interesting. Close to the water it is like a sand bar, forming an excellent shelving beach for bathing, and a playground for the sandpipers and the plovers. You may often come upon a flock of these birds on a bar, as your canoe rounds the bend, running back and forth and bobbing their heads up and down. "Tip ups," some boys call them. But back a few feet from the new shelf of the bar, the receding waters have deposited soil and seeds, and last year's deposit is already rank and green with swampy verdure. Then the willows begin. Almost every new tongue of land has its clump of willows, sown by the sweep of the stream on a curve as regular as any topiary artist could lay down, and trimmed to a uniform height. There is one long bend on our river, perhaps four hundred yards in extent, which is not a sharp but a gradual curve. The river was evidently nearly straight at this point a generation or two ago, but something deflected its current—perhaps a tree which fell into the water and piled up a dam of roots and tangled flotsam. The current, swinging out from this new obstruction, ate into the farther bank and gradually channelled a great bend, depositing new land on the eastern side. Along high-water mark on this new land, following the



new curve of the channel, it planted a hedge of willow possibly fifteen years ago. That hedge is now thirty feet high, as uniform along the top as though it were annually trimmed, and presenting an unbroken wall of shimmering, delicate green set on the sweeping curve of the stream, with a pink garden of Joe-pye-weed at its feet. There is no gardener like the river when you give him a chance!

The river understands the art of the border. In Stockbridge is a fine old estate which has two miles and a half of river front, though the entire frontage of the estate on the highway is less than half a mile. It used to be known as the Ox Bow Farm. There have been many striking shrubbery borders planted on its drives, no doubt at considerable expense; but down on one of the innumerable bends of the river bank, at the feet of aged, stately willows, and visible only to him who voyages by boat or canoe, is the most beautiful border of all. It is, of course, on the convex side of the bend. The curve is gentle, and the opposite bank shows no exposed soil, being exquisitely draped with wild grape vines, a little feathery clematis, and great masses of wild balsam apple (*Echinocystis lobata*) with its delicate white blooms, its light green foliage, and its prickly fruit gourds. Some people call it by the homelier but perhaps more appropriate name of wild cucumber. Around the sweep beneath the great willows, set close to the water in dark, rich mould, is a long

border of the mild water pepper (*Polygonum hydro-piperoides*)—that and nothing else. Its own luxuriousness keeps out all other weeds and alien flowers. The current is the gardener who keeps the edge in line, the beautiful sweeping line of the bend. There are four hundred feet, perhaps, of this border, and it is twenty feet thick. The pepper grows half as tall as a man, a graceful plant with lance-shaped leaves, and in August its level top is a delicate, creamy white, flushed with pink, where the finger-like blooms droop gracefully atop the stalks. No border could be more formal than this, and yet none could be more utterly artless. As you drift by in the low sun of a summer afternoon, hearing the insects hum in the flowers, seeing the white flash of a kingfisher down the tree-hung aisles of the river ahead, listening to the distant chimes floating from the village tower, you know the peace of gardens as you scarce may ever know it in a garden made with hands.

But the shiftings of the river bed bring even more secret delights. Often in the course of years an old channel becomes closed, no sign of it remaining but a little break in the bank and a bay of still water winding into the woods. Sometimes the current has even laid a sand bar completely across the opening, converting the ancient bed into a swamp or stagnant pond. In some parts of our country these old channels are known as coves, in other parts as swales. As your canoe drifts along they tempt you from the main stream, and they

always repay any effort you may expend pushing through the reeds and lily pads. Coming downstream upon one, you might readily miss it, for the sand bar always noses a little way across the mouth, even when it has not closed up the bank completely, and so hides it from view. The mouth of the swale is sometimes marked in our country, however, by a sycamore tree, the white mottled bark shining out against the landscape. Presumably the tree has found security here, where the current no longer worries its roots, and has survived. Stopping your craft before the entrance, you look into a cool green forest glade over a carpet of lily pads, with the golden blossoms of the cow lilies gaily gemming it. You are less than mortal if this water glade does not tempt you to push your canoe through the leaves—slowly, secretly, for the stillness of the river is even deeper here, where the water mirror is black ahead and its oozy edges are odorous with sweet flag. The very flowers speak the silent wildness of the place, for here, if anywhere, the shy cardinal flower makes a red reflection on the water, an incomparable red in this dark, shadowy spot, and here the purple loosestrife grows in such a gloom that we understand at last why Shakespeare wrote that “our cold maids do dead men’s fingers call them.” (To be sure, it is disputed that Shakespeare did mean loosestrife by “long purples.” We hasten to make this admission before somebody hurls the Variorum “Hamlet” at our head!) Here, also, the

yellow jewel weed on the higher ground is most like an orchid, and the blue vervain—which is purple—most like fairy candelabra; and here is no vista over the banks to the surrounding hilltops. The rank foliage forms a solid wall, and arches like a groined roof overhead. Only through the opening behind us do we catch a bit of the river, glistening under the sun, as through an open door. This is a chapel beside the river road, a spot for deeper meditation on our languid way.

Here, too, as we watch over the side of the boat, we see just the ghost of a pickerel move like a sudden lightning streak of shadow under the weeds that bear his name, and wonder why the boy whom we passed upstream sitting in the sun on the bank does not come here to cast his line. Perhaps it is because the small boy loves the sense of a procession in a river, loves to see the water go by, to watch the passing boats, to feel the sweep of landscape, almost as much as (if less consciously than) he loves to fish. The cloistered spots are, after all, for a more contemplative maturity—it is only our pride that prevents us from saying for middle age. The swales are beautiful back waters, and youth is not yet satiated with midstream.

The bird and animal life of the land below the river bank is a different thing, no less than are the flora and the view. Two live things stand out most prominently in my memories of our northern rivers—kingfishers and turtles, the kingfisher flying ever on ahead of the boat

down the willow aisles, flashing as white sometimes as the occasional birches which stab their reflection into the dark water, the turtles plopping off logs as the boat draws near, or thrusting out inquiring heads to watch it pass. The proud-crested kingfisher is the over-lord of our rivers, as the turkey buzzard patrols the red rivers of the South. Whether sitting high on a limb overhanging the water, or flying down the green aisle ahead, or swooping for a fish, this beautiful bird is seldom absent from the vista to give it a characteristic touch. The kingfishers, indeed, seem to have each his well-defined river beat, and if one bird encroaches on the fish preserves of his neighbour upstream there is trouble at once. He is driven back with a great noise and flutter, and as soon as he is back on his own ground he is just as quick to turn and drive out his neighbour. Often the kingfisher will fly ahead of your boat, alighting on tree after tree, as if afraid to pass you; but ultimately he will get up courage, fly over your head, and return to the point where you first flushed him. I have never known a kingfisher to continue with the boat indefinitely. Sooner or later they always return, and you will often find each bird at the old spot when you come back upstream.

Another bird characteristic of our northern waters is the blue heron, which lives alike on the rivers and by the salt ponds making in from the sea. The baby herons attain a very considerable size before they



essay locomotion, and the first waddles of one of these ungainly birds are easily watched from a considerable distance, and are quite irresistible. A mother and child used to come up from the secluded banks of the Ham Branch in Franconia, and take an early morning or late afternoon stroll in the meadows in full sight of the cottage where we were spending the summer. "Here come the herons!" was a familiar cry, which brought us tumbling out upon the veranda. But it proved useless to try to walk up on the birds. At first the baby struggled back, at the note of warning from its mother, with a great flapping of wings, into the bushes. But in a short time it could fly as well as she, and both birds would get up speed, swaying from side to side on their long, spidery legs, thrusting out their necks and flapping their great wings, the very acme of awkwardness, till suddenly, like an aëroplane leaving the ground, they caught the air. Then their long legs trailed out in a graceful line beneath them, their necks were folded down, the soft blue of their feathers glinted in the sun, and they sailed away with all the grace of supreme efficiency, to a rhythmic beat of wings. Perhaps no bird illustrates so complete a change from the shambling and ungainly to the compact, graceful, even stately. The blue heron are less numerous in our Berkshire country than in wilder regions, of course, yet they are not rare by any means, and often add their peculiar touch of Japanese charm to our river vistas. Their

smaller cousins, the little green herons, are common, also, flying back and forth over the fishing grounds.

A bird that is rare, however, is the wood duck. It is rare in any region now, more's the pity. It is one of the few ducks which nest in trees, preferring an old hollow branch hanging over a stream. I have never found such a nest myself, but once, on the golf links in Stockbridge; a horribly hooked drive took me into a piece of woods by the river bend, and under the overhanging trees on the opposite bank I saw a family of wood duck swimming, four little ones in a row following the mother about like some tiny flotilla in practice evolutions. A misstep of mine on a dead limb sent them all scurrying under the dark bank, and I saw them no more, for the impatient foursome rudely interrupted my vigil. Nor have I ever seen them at that spot again.

Of the four-footed inhabitants of the land below the river bank, the painted turtle is most common with us. The turtles lead a lazy life, lying for the most part on an old log in the sun, and it is difficult to see why their dispositions are not more amiable. Perhaps, indeed, they are amiable among themselves, keeping their ill temper for the human finger. Half a dozen of them will often bask on a foot or two of snag above the water without any sign of quarrel, dropping plop, plop, plop into the stream as the boat draws near. Yet I seem to remember disastrous domestic strife, when, as a boy, I tried to keep several turtles in the same tub. Turtles

are credited with attaining great antiquity. Perhaps age makes them snappy—age and idleness. The combination has been known to work a similar effect on the disposition of animals more elevated on the biological ladder! Our northern snapping turtles attain a very considerable size, a foot across, and make a delicious pie. Often, too, they seem to be smitten with a wanderlust, leaving their land below the river bank to go adventuring across the fields. The big fellows are usually thus caught out of their element, at times half a mile from the water. The largest snapper I ever saw was lumbering along down a country road, in the dust and heat, so comically like an illustration for the fable that we looked about for the hare.

Another common inhabitant of our river world is the muskrat, though the rise in value of his pelt is rapidly working havoc in his ranks. He is now, in his final transformation, often mink, and not infrequently, I am afraid, something more expensive still! The muskrat is a little brother of the beaver, and while not so industrious, he is more spunky. He lives on lily roots and fresh-water mussels. You will often see mussel shells open, and the mussels gone, close to the water's edge on the sand shelf or at the foot of a log. The muskrat has been enjoying his midnight supper there. His summer home is in a hole under the bank, either of the river itself, or of some bordering swale. In winter, however, he remains in the swales almost

entirely, and builds himself a good imitation of a small beaver lodge out of reeds. An old lodge often resembles a hummock in the shoal water, and would readily escape detection. Next to man, the muskrat's chief foes are the horned owls and the foxes. When he hears, sees, or smells one of these enemies, he dives into the water, slapping it with his tail in warning to his fellows, and swims under an overhanging bank. The owl, however, often waits patiently over the spot where he dove, and gets him when he comes up. He can hardly be a savory meal, but owls are notoriously not particular.

There are otters in our stream, but most people have never seen them. A few of those men who are still born with the woodcraft instinct amid an alien generation, and surreptitiously trap on the outskirts of our groomed and gardened villages, know where the otters are to be found, know where they have established their cross-country trails, and now and then in Spring mysterious bundles are shipped to West Twelfth Street, New York. But most of us never guess that the otter is our neighbour. Where the main stream is polluted, he appears to keep to the tributaries, and only rarely, in a secluded spot, will you find a trace of his slide down the bank, or his web-footed tracks leading away from the stream, probably cross-country to some other stream. It is this habit of the otter to establish regular overland crossings which is his undoing, for it enables the hunter to place his traps.

A young otter at play is perhaps the happiest creature on sea or land. He will climb a slippery bank, and slide down, plop, into the water, over and over again, dragging his feet as he slides, his brown, cylindrical body going head first like a torpedo. In the water his feats put the finest water polo player to the blush. He will lie on his back and kick a floating stick into the air, or worry it from paw to paw, playing, no doubt, that it is a fish. Then he will retreat from it, or dive beneath it, and suddenly dart upon it with incredible speed. The otter can outswim a pickerel, in fact. Its dexterity in the water is amazing. But the chances of seeing it are becoming fewer and fewer.

There are daughters of Eve, and sons of Adam, who do not like snakes, yet what is more beautiful than a mottled water snake coiled amid the curiously blotched roots of a sycamore tree above the dark water of a river pool? He will not harm you. Indeed, his first instinct is to get out of your way. Even the deadly cotton-mouth moccasins of the Southern swamps flee shyly from your approach. Down in the deep, shadowed pool at the foot of some dam or rapids a water snake will often live to a venerable old age, till his bright spots have almost entirely disappeared and his skin is a dull, slaty gray before he sheds it, a glossy black when it is renewed. He feeds on unwary little fishes, and adds a touch of mystery to the pool, the mystery of his serpentine wisdom and the dusky



wriggle of his body just caught where a sunbeam pierces the water below the boat.

"It's brother and sister to me," said the Water Rat in "The Wind in the Willows," speaking, you will recall, of his land below the river bank, "and aunts and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing." The Rat was one of those excellent good fellows who have passed the age of adventuring, and settled down to a kind of glowing and enthusiastic content with their chosen surroundings. A bit of a poet, too, was the Rat, glorifying his river.

But there are days when all our sympathies are with Ratty. It is the full tide of August now, and the river garden is at its height. Two days of recent rain have filled the channel and flushed the swales. Yesterday we spent a long, lazy afternoon voyaging in this other-world so close to us, yet so far removed, and came back as from a dream. A soft haze silvered the bounding hills and lazy white clouds looked at themselves in the water. Mild water peppers waved their finger-like blooms above us upon the bends; the blue vervains held up their purple spikes; where a chunk of bank thatch had fallen almost into the water, a tiny garden of forget-me-nots was nodding at its reflection; on a green eyeot in midstream, wild sunflowers and jewel weed and pink thistles grew together; and everywhere be-

neath the willows the great beds of Joe-pye-weed made glorious the vistas. Golden-rod, too, nodded at us over the banks, and in the cloistered swales the cardinal flower glowed. Once a great blue heron, resting on motionless wings, went by us overhead, like a perfectly controlled monoplane. Each bend of the river invited to new mysteries. At a break in the trees mild-faced cattle came down to drink and gazed at us with placid curiosity, their forelegs submerged—perhaps the coolest and most luscious sight in nature upon a summer day! Once, through the willows, we saw a country house sitting proudly in its broad acres; once the white spire of a village church; again, at the end of a sun-flecked lane, a green pasture running up a hillside crowned by a sentinel oak. On the dark, quiet water always was a second landscape which shimmered, a little unquiet and reversed, and between the two we floated, down the fairy aisles of a garden, peaceful, unworldly, remote. My formal beds of phlox and antirrhinums, of platycodons and stock and balsam, and my tiny cement pool, looked stiff and mean enough when I came back to them. Even the compost heap was better than they, for it had draped itself with a gigantic squash vine, a mass of sunflowers, a wild cucumber, and a tangle of poppies. Some day I shall own a place which takes in both banks of a river, and the genius of the stream will be my gardener.

## CHAPTER XVI

### TREES

ANY real estate dealer can bear witness to the depth and universality of the human love for trees. A country house without trees is almost unthinkable—certainly unsellable; and when Nature has not provided arboreal adornment, the builder at once sets out to supply the deficiency. Sometimes, to be sure, he uses but little judgment in so doing, sticking Colorado blue spruces in the middle of New England lawns or messing other exotics into clumps which Nature would disdain; but his instinct is sound, if his taste is not. He must have trees about his dwelling. Some men demand them for architectural effect, to frame the house, to back the borders, to make those masses of shadow at the end of a lawn or vista which are essential to a successful garden. A garden without trees, in fact, is even more depressing than a land without hills. Some men, again, demand trees for their protection from the prying world or the winter wind, some for their shade, some, perhaps, just for their mute friendliness. But at bottom, I believe, all these reasons are the same. A man demands trees about his

dwelling because deep within him, deep perhaps as the primal instincts of the race, is a great and trustful affection humorously akin to the dog's trust in the table beneath which he lies whether to escape the heat of Summer or the 4th of July fire crackers. For all the centuries of upward development, for all our tall-built cities and snug dwellings, we are close to the ancient Mother still. Go out some day into the wild places, let night come on, or a storm, and see how you turn like a homing bird to the shelter of the hemlock thicket! Even on my own little place of a few acres, there is a grove of pines near the house, murmurous like the sea, and beside it three gnarled old apple trees which put a green roof over that bit of the lawn, and to them I return a dozen times a day out of the sunshine or the moonlight on the garden, as a man returns to the welcome of his roof and hearth. It has never occurred to me before to explain or analyze this feeling, it has been so much an unconscious part of my life; but I realize its implications now.

Trees, of course, are the most beautiful as well as the most useful of growing things, not because they are the largest but because they attain often to the finest symmetry and because they have the most decided and appealing personalities. Any one who has not felt the personality of trees is oddly insensitive. I cannot, indeed, imagine a person wholly incapable of such feeling, though the man who plants a Colorado blue

spruce on a trimmed lawn east of the Alleghanies, where it is obliged to comport itself with elms and trolley cars, is admittedly pretty callous. Trees are peculiarly the product of their environment, and their personalities, in a natural state, have invariably a beautiful fitness.

Take the white pine for example, noblest of all our common North American trees. The pine by nature is gregarious in the extreme. One old patriarch, if left alone, will in a few years breed a family of seedlings half an acre in extent about its feet, and this little stand of seedlings, in time, if they are left alone, will in a single generation begin to breed more seedlings out to windward, and thus in a hundred years the patriarch, the grandfather of the forest, will be hidden perhaps in the depths of an extensive wood. The young trees as they begin to grow are crowded thickly together, and very soon their lateral branches begin to touch and shade completely the ground beneath. As soon as this happens, of course, all the lateral branches below the upper layer are shaded, too, and begin to die. Only the tops of the trees get the sun, so they give up the natural effort to spread, and devote most of their attention to racing upward after more and more sunshine. The weaker trees, crowded in between the strong, sooner or later give up the struggle and die, but the strong ones keep going up and up, till all signs of their lower lateral branches have completely disappeared and the lofty trunks tower straight as ruled lines for fifty, seventy-



five, in primeval forests even for one hundred feet in air, before the trees grow a single limb. It takes many generations to make such a forest, though, alas! but a few months to destroy it. What man who has ever entered the hushed cathedral aisles of a mighty pine grove—fragrant with that indescribable incense, murmurous overhead with the whisper of surf upon a lonely shore, mysterious with the tiny patter of pitch, illumined through vistas between the solemn uprights that look like blue daggers of light—can ever forget it? It is like nothing else on earth. One fancies, sometimes, that the Egyptian temples must have been, on their man-made scale, something akin, though with far less grace and airiness. A pine tree is always graceful, which is hardly the word for an Egyptian column.

Yet the isolated pine, which has not fought upward in the crowded phalanx of its fellows but has expanded laterally as well, is a totally different tree, with a totally different personality—a very noble and sturdy personality, too. How characteristic of our northern mountains is the ragged upland pasture, where the cattle wander through hassocks of grass and sweet fern, and by some bit of gray stone wall a single pine stands up alone, its branches extended in angular parallels like a cedar of Lebanon, broken and stunted short on the side toward the prevailing winter storms, streaming away more gracefully to leeward, and the massive trunk—comparatively short and gnarled instead of tall and

mast-like—inclined a little from the winter gales as if it had stood its ground and taken their buffets for a hundred years without more than bending backward from the hips when the blows rained thickest. I know such a pine on a hilltop which has been carved by the storms of a century into a quaint and splendid replica of the Winged Victory, and there is no passer who sees it but pauses a moment to admire its rugged beauty, its suggestion of triumphant, dogged strength. To deny that pine personality is to prove your utter lack of imagination.

The American elm is another common native tree possessing both great beauty and a strongly marked personality. It is easy to say that the elm was made the standard shade tree of American municipalities by the early settlers because it was easily procured and physically well adapted to the purpose. But that really does not explain the choice. The maple was quite as common, is more easily transplanted, and a much more rapid grower. Indeed, as a matter of fact, it was rather more generally used on that account. The ash and the oak were at hand, the pine and the hemlock, the sycamore and linden. All of them, moreover, were employed. So were the chestnut and the black cherry. But the elm was felt to be the standard then, and is still recognized as the standard, because its personality so exactly comports with geometrical street vistas, with the formal lines of architecture, with the orderliness and dignity

of university campuses and civic squares. The elm is essentially a self-sufficient tree. It does not thrive in groves. It has a standard type of its own, and it either attains this type or is lost to view. Sometimes, in a wild state, it attains it by killing out its immediate competitors, but more often it is killed out by them, and the elm which comes to maturity is the one which has lodged in a favoured spot where there is no competition, such as a river meadow, where the spring freshets have dropped the seed on fertile soil and the roots can get down to water.

We all know the type—the noble trunk of massive girth, tapering very gradually upward to the first spring of branches, and then dissolving in those branches as a water jet might dissolve in many upward and out-curving streams, till the whole is lost in the spray of the foliage. Like many trees which grow alone, it develops an exquisite symmetry, but with the elm this symmetry is not only one of general contour but of individual limbs. Not only is the silhouette symmetrical, but the skeleton, branch balancing branch. That is what gives it its remarkable fitness to comport with architectural lines, with geometrically designed vistas. It has a formal structure, and a consequent dignity, which make it the logical shade for a village street, a chapel, a library, the scholarly procession in cap and gown. Add to that dignity its arched and airy lightness and its splendid size, and you have the king of urban trees.

Yet I sometimes think the elm is never so lovely as when it grows along the river bends, where Nature planted it. We all know such river bends, every American cherishes in memory the picture of a green interval, of browsing cattle, of a winding stream with vervain and wild cucumber on the banks, and now and then, rising like graceful green fountains or like great vases on slender stems, the noble elms—the wardens of the peaceful landscape. The valley of the Housatonic, in the Berkshire Hills, is peculiarly rich, perhaps, in splendid trees of many kinds, especially willows. Yet its elms stand out with a certain aristocratic aloofness, and demand, or rather compel, the chief attention. Over the well-kept village streets they spread magnificently, with the spring of a Gothic arch in their massive limbs, and oriole nests depend like tiny platinum ear-drops from the outer twigs. But along the river you see the whole tree, you are not conscious of it as the underside of an arch but rather as a complete and beautiful design, a mammoth vase rising on its graceful stem from the emerald meadows. There are five such elms in a row near my home. They grow along the bank of a swale close to the river, with space enough between them so that each tree has reached its standard of form, and yet each, too, has conceded a little something to its neighbour and made up for the loss by a fringe of foliage close around the trunk, as well-fed elms sometimes do. They are of

almost exactly the same height and girth, and yet, if you look closely, no two are really alike. They differ as the great doors of Notre Dame in Paris differ—individual yet harmonious. When the bulwarks of willow around the river bends are turning to soft, grayish silver in the low afternoon light, when the shadows are creeping like long amethyst fingers over the grass, these five trees rise in radiant lightness against the west, every detail of their lovely symmetry outlined sharply against the sky, and from the topmost branches a meadow lark pours out his vesper song. They are like a row of figures by Botticelli arrested in a stately dance.

These same trees are scarcely less beautiful in Winter. Some lovers of trees, indeed, delight in the body more than the raiment. A nude tree may be pathetic in its suggestion of vanished Summer, but it is seldom or never unlovely. Did not Ruskin somewhere speak of the wonderful *life* in the line of a twig or branch? Certainly no line in Nature is so vital, whether it be the straight taper of a Norway spruce trunk or the radiating forked lightning of an aged locust top. The locust tree, indeed, is too little appreciated, especially by our artists. Those people who are enraptured by the crooked pine branch in a Japanese print will often pass beneath a fine old native locust without so much as glancing up to observe its true aspect. Its branches are always at the top, in flowering time hung with



fragrant white blossoms not unlike the Japanese wistaria, later conspicuous for their curiously sparse and delicate foliage, and, best of all, in Winter showing in stark outline the most bewildering forks and twists and angles of growth, yet not a limb of them which, for all its irregularity, has not a splendid force and rugged picturesqueness. Those tough, jabbing branches bespeak the tough fibre of the wood. Perhaps only the man who has been forced to tackle a dead locust with an axe can truly appreciate this tree. I cannot say why—some childish and now forgotten association, no doubt—but a gray, aged locust always reminds me of Ulysses after his years of wanderings, and never more so than in Winter when the limbs are nude and the joints seem twisted as if with conflict.

Against an evening sky, indeed, almost any bare tree takes on a strange mystery and charm. Where the still brook gleams like quicksilver in the grass and the gathering night seems to exhale from the undergrowth, the ash trees and other sentinels on some old fence line stand up to the fading west with every branch and twig distinct and black, making a lacy pattern of infinite intricacy, which for all its transparency seems somehow to imprison a little of the rising twilight. I remember once tramping north from Cambridge, in those youthful days when one wandered cross-country with his boon companion and settled all the problems of the universe; and presently,



The great oak of the pastures flings its outline against the cloud-race



out in the rolling Middlesex fields, we crested a hill by a long, straight road which ran mournfully into the gathering November twilight, like some road in Hardy's novels. At the crest we had a glimpse on the far horizon of the last red banner of the defeated day, and running down the slope toward it was a leafless apple orchard. The trees were gray, the ground beneath them was a smoky brown, and in their gray tracery of branches the sunset had hung a veil, a veil of softest amethyst, the mysterious veil of Astarte. To this day I can recall our consciousness that this orchard was *alive*, that it was a personality, or a group of personalities, whom we were passing. We seemed to leave it behind whispering strange things, as the mournful November wind came over the upland.

Did you ever look carefully at an old, neglected apple tree in Winter? An old, neglected apple tree, of course, always makes the arms of the true agriculturist yearn for a pruning saw, as Grizel's arms rocked for a sponge and water when she saw a dirty baby. But, forgetting farmers' bulletins for a moment, did you ever pause to admire the veritable spray of "suckers" such a tree will have sent up, like a shower-bath nozzle turned upside down? The pattern they make is tangled and formless, but what a testimony they are to the vitality of the tree, what eloquent witnesses of its will to live! A dead limb-end may have rotted back to make a flicker's or a bluebird's nest, the trunk

may be ringed with the sapsucker's bores, the tree may be lopsided and perishing with scale—but all over it sprout the suckers, its symbol of continued struggle. The poor old apple tree beside some abandoned farmhouse or cellar-hole, where, perchance, no house has stood for generations, still fighting for life, still striving to "function," is to me a brave and beautiful thing.

The trees of the hills and rocky pastures have a different character from their fatly nourished brothers of the plain, and, as among men, they are often less beautiful and more interesting. The sugar maple which starts life as a tiny seedling in the sediment of a rain pool on top of a boulder, and survives by sending its roots down around the very rock till it seems, in the course of a century, to clasp the rock "with crooked hands" as an eagle might hold a ball in its claws, usually develops a rough sturdiness of trunk and very often a twisted formation of growth, which suggest almost human qualities of aggressiveness and tenacity. Such a tree seems actually to have wrestled with its environment, and put its enemies underfoot. It is to the upland hardwoods, too, that all boys know they must go for nuts. Did not the finest chestnuts always grow on a hill? And what man is so poor in memories that he cannot recall those golden October mornings when there was frost in the air, and the pungent smell of dried sweet fern, and up among the boulders the gray hickories, still flaunting a few yellow leaves, had



shed their store? The nut tree has a certain rough, scraggly quality, a clean, hard, wiry, knotted character, that exactly comports with boulder-strewn pastures, a keen October sky, and the autumn wind piping over the hilltops. The great oak of the pastures, also, flings its outlines against the cloud-race and the blue with magnificent masculinity, and the dignity of age and power.

The canoe birch, too, is essentially an upland tree; it does not thrive near sea level, at any rate in Massachusetts. Farther north it creeps down nearer the coast. The birch, above all our American trees, delights in theatrical effects. And if that sentence is objected to on the ground of "pathetic fallacy," we will commit the whole sin at once, and add that it is the most feminine of trees! In earliest Spring, when the hepaticas are pushing up last year's leaves and our Berkshire mountain sides are donning their frail, delicate veils of colour, the young birches are conspicuous for the startling brightness of their new foliage, a green so much lighter and more vivid than all the other greens that it would arrest attention even if it were not borne on a snow-white stem. Your young birch has all the daring of a débutante! Later, when the summer thunder-storms come, the birch has another trick up its sleeve. Some afternoon a dark, gunmetal thunder-head will mass behind the crest of a hill, and suddenly an old birch on the summit will leap into

startling prominence, so that it focusses the entire attention, like a single splendid streak of chalk-white lightning. Again, in mid-winter, when the birch by rights should be protectively coloured and inconspicuous, it is the other trees we do not notice, and the birch which rises by the edge of the frozen stream, perhaps, or against the dark wall of the pines, and displays all its snowy limbs to best advantage against evergreen or sky.

Only the sycamore has a bark which can rival the birch for showy effect—yet how different are the two trees. It has never occurred to any one to call the sycamore a feminine tree. It is large, dignified, masculine, and totally unaware of the picturesque effect created by its tortuous branches and its great mottled patches of grayish white bark, alternating with brown. When all is said, the birch is a vain tree, but we must also admit it has a right to be; and we cannot scold it, either, it wears its white betimes with such an air of virgin innocence.

Many years ago a lover of trees in the village where my boyhood was passed prepared a little booklet, describing and picturing a score or so of the finest trees in the township. Only the other day I came across a copy, after the lapse of more than two decades. I sat down to its pages as to a feast. Yes, there was the old Cap'n George Bachelder sassafras, the largest in the State, sixty-two feet high! How familiar it

looked! How my nostrils could inhale again the aroma of the chips hacked with a jack knife from its roots! And here, on the next page, was the Emerson oak, growing between the barn and the house, and throwing mottled shadows over both—a mighty spread, indeed! I could hear the horses stamping in the barn, I could smell the hay, I could savour again the coolness of the shade as we dropped beneath it on our way home from the swimming hole. That oak and the old Emerson homestead were unthinkable apart. If I, who merely lived a mile on down the road, could so thrill to a picture of that tree in after years, what, I reflected, must be the affection in which an Emerson holds it? Is it still there? Surely it must be, for the oak outlives our little spans, and that any one could lay an axe to it is inconceivable.

So I lingered through the book, greeting each picture as I would greet the likeness of a boyhood friend, each bringing back to me not only its own image, but what a wealth else of associated memories! Surely, every man holds certain trees thus warmly in his affection—trees he planted, or his father or his grandfather planted, trees which gave him shade and shelter, trees which were an integral part of his home, trees which had some grace of limb or charm of character which forever endeared them to him, through the subtle channels of aesthetic satisfaction. "Trees have no personality?" I said, as I closed the pamphlet. "Then there is no such

thing as the influence of line and contour on the human mind, and no such thing as affection for the inanimate—which is nonsense.”

But one tree this pamphlet did not picture. It was a great chestnut, full five feet through, storm-torn and lightning-scarred, which stood high upon a windy summit, the shepherd of a hundred hills. They were little hills, green and rolling, and from the first great limb of the chestnut (which was as big as a barrel) they looked like a patchwork quilt stitched with stone walls. Over them the cattle browsed, or the reapers clicked their midsummer locust song, or just the breeze passed whispering. And four feet dangled from the great limb of the chestnut, and four eyes looked out across the little hills to a far pond and the misty horizon, and two hearts sang a song as old as the hills themselves. When the sun declined, the shadow of the great tree swept out eastward; the cattle filed down to the bars and lowed, the leader shaking her bell protestingly; one pair of arms must needs be raised to assist the more encumbered climber down to the top of our ladder, which was a huge piece of broken limb propped against the trunk, and then again be raised from the ground to swing a burden, all too light, to earth. Then there must follow a little ceremony—the cutting of a tiny notch in a deep and secret recess of the bark to signify one more day of happiness spent in that protecting shelter, and sometimes a warm pink cheek was laid against the furrowed

trunk, and a voice whispered: "Nice old grandpa chestnut!"

That was many years ago. I wonder if that noble old tree is standing yet, or whether the chestnut blight, the axe, or the lightning, has robbed the little hills of their shepherd. I shall never know, I shall never count again the little notches in a secret recess of the bark, nor hear the sweet, silly secrets the old tree would not betray. I could go there now, to the very spot, yes, on the darkest night; a memory in the soles of my feet would wake and tell me the path. But I shall never take the risk. Some memories must never be dusted, some paths never retrod. For me that storm-scarred grandfather of a tree shall forever stand shepherd over the little hills, the little, green rolling hills where the cattle browse and the wind whispers to the mullein stalks; and against its hoary bark a soft pink cheek is pressed, and I am twenty-one again.



## CHAPTER XVII

### LANDSCAPE LINES AND GARDENING

THERE are certain lines or a composition of lines in Nature which have a definite effect on the spirit of, Man, induce a definite mood, and, recognizing this Man has often made use of them in his architectural structures. There is, for instance, a pronounced difference between the spiritual effect of a vertical and a horizontal line, when they are stressed sufficiently to dominate the scene or the structure. The long horizontal is a symbol of peace, the soaring vertical of aspiration. It is easy to see why this should be so, the one remaining plodding and pedestrian on the comfortable level, the other leaving the ground and making for the stars.

Nothing is more peaceful, more soothing to the spirit, than a canal. Brimming and level, without flow or current, it lays its watery highway through the flat fields, and life would seem leisurely as you strolled beside it even if you were unaware that traffic is actually leisurely upon its bosom. A canal is the apotheosis of the horizontal, the trees which march by its bank falling into misty green procession like a line of level housetops,

the barge lying horizontal on its flood, even the driver and the mules and the cable falling into level line as you see them through a haze of rain, perhaps, or the morning fog. There was once an unhappy time in my life when I fought the demon *Insomnia*, and when my nerves were at the breaking point I used to take a train to Princeton and idle in a canoe up the canal there, with the dreaming towers of the college rising above the trees on the distant hill and presently a sight of the quaint little whitewashed lock house with its window boxes of gay geraniums. That canal was better than medicine for me, soothing, tranquil, sleepy.

But how different an effect is wrought by even so short a vertical as a ten-foot dam or natural waterfall. Even though the stream is descending, the eye takes an upward tilt, catching on the rocks at the side or the smooth, gleaming columns of the water, and seeing in imagination the higher level above. One views such a cataract as *Niagara*, of course, with a confusion of emotions, half stunned by its roar and overwhelmed by the volume of its waters. Yet when you stand under the falls and look up, you feel distinctly the mood of aspiration, you are less aware of a descending deluge than of a beautiful upward-soaring line ending in a suave, glittering curve that springs out of sight into the sun and spray. One of the most perfect examples of the vertical line in Nature, of course, is furnished by a pine grove on the shore of a lake, where each tall, straight trunk stands

up companioning its fellows, in stately silhouette against the sunlit water beyond. Our eyes may not seek the branches above, the mere passage across the vision of those upright columns being enough to evoke the mood, a grave, solemn cathedral mood. I have often wondered if it were not such a grove of trees which gave to the sculptor of the Parthenon frieze his idea for the procession of vertical draperies which add such grave stateliness to that composition.

Man's use of the vertical in his buildings, of course, reaches its most characteristic expression in Gothic architecture. The mood of aspiration so closely associated with all religions is directly appealed to alike by the Moslem minaret and the Christian spire, but it was in the Gothic style that it reached its flower, and the soaring uprights sprang unbroken into the dim tracery of sky-borne vaults, the innermost skeleton structure of the cathedral revealing itself in verticals. One of the chief reasons, of course, why an English cathedral never gives you quite the stirring effect of Rheims or Chartres is because horizontals have been introduced. Curiously enough, it was not until Cass Gilbert applied Gothic to our modern skyscrapers (in the West Street building and the Woolworth Tower, particularly), that they justified their height aesthetically. If you look attentively at the ordinary skyscraper, you will see that the various stories are clearly marked by horizontal rows of windows—the building is a layer cake of hori-

izontals, a scheme which obviously does not comport with its extraordinary proportions. But by stressing the spaces between the windows into unbroken piers and thus throwing the windows back and relating each one not to those on either side, but to those below and above on the same vertical line, an entirely new effect is achieved. The mood of the upright is evoked, as befits so tall and narrow a structure, and a true and fitting beauty is created.

We naturally think of mountains as something vertical, but they are seldom vertical as a matter of fact; they have a vast variety of line and of mood. The Berkshire Hills, for example, run in two parallel ranges east and west of a sweet green valley, with level tops like the crest of an advancing wave, and the scenery among them is most often spoken of as "peaceful." It is the peace, of course, of the horizontal, the peace, almost, of the slow canal or the long green marshes bordering the sea, or would be were it not for the pleasant contrast of sloping shoulders. It is only the sharp peak or the towering pyramid which has the true vertical aspiration, such a peak as the Matterhorn, or Chief Mountain in northern Montana (which stands out sharp and precipitous from the wall of the Great Divide, sentinelling the prairie), or the white-capped cone of Fujiyama, used over and over in their prints by Hokusai or Hiroshige, like a religious motif. Mountains, indeed, are rather more frequently disturbing on a near view, because of their broken lines, their half uprights and

shattered horizontals, with the emphasis now on one; now on the other. Such complete chaos of lines breeds restlessness, and on a dull day which takes out the colour, actual depression. One of the most miserable days I ever spent was under a cloud in the pocket cañon which holds Cracker Lake, in Glacier Park. The Divide soared upward into the creeping gray roof with a tremendous, an overwhelming vertical magnificence, but all around its base were vast shale slides at an angle halfway between vertical and horizontal, pitching into the flat lake, and behind, through the cañon mouth, was every conceivable tilt and angle of rock and shale and forest. No line predominated, since the top of the Divide was buried in scud and could not take the eye up to the blue above. You felt yourself in the heart of upheaved chaos.

Of all the individual lines that mountains achieve, probably the most beautiful and potent is the dome. The mood evoked by the dome is the grave, calm acceptance of infinity, and that corresponding sense of mystery and wonder. Curiously enough, it is most often the doming summit we hold in affection, too, perhaps because of its benignity. It has such amplitude of base, such easy lines of ascent, such an aspect of monumental solidity, and such sheer beauty in its sweeping curves, that it is almost invariably our favourite among its fellows. At least, that is the case with me. Moosilauke is my best loved mountain in the White Hills of New Hampshire, and always seems to me



a more impressive as well as a more beautiful pile than Mount Washington, which out-tops it by fifteen hundred feet. In my own Berkshire Hills, Mount Everett (or The Dome, as it is popularly called), in the southwestern corner of Massachusetts, is nearly one thousand feet lower than Graylock, in the northwestern; yet as you view it from the plain below it seems far more like a major mountain, it actually suggests size and dignity and eternal solidity to a much greater extent, because it rises in a beautiful and perfect dome out of the long rampart of the range and lays a majestic curve against the western sky, a curve as sweet as that of a woman's breast, as infinite as the sea rim.

Man, of course, has used the dome in his structures since the days of the Romans, undaunted by its difficulties; Brunelleschi, Michael Angelo, Wren wrestled with its problems in later times; and to-day it is a symbol of the enduring solidity of the state. Man's domes are sprung more sharply than Nature's, however, and the long, sweet curve of infinity is almost lost in them. Oddly enough, where that curve is most happily caught in an architectural structure is in the span of the old Brooklyn Bridge, springing out of the flank of lower Manhattan, the most architecturally chaotic section of the globe! The newer bridges upstream have missed it, but the air-flung boulevard of the first great suspension structure rises and hovers and dips with the alluring, solemn, and lovely span of the infinite.

There is one more line in Nature which must not be forgotten—the circle. Whether you stand upon a mountain-top or on the deck of a ship or in the centre of the Newark marshes ringed by crawling freight trains and smoking chimney stacks, you have only to glimpse the horizon in a circle all about you to feel at once a sudden awareness of the great dome of the sky overhead, Omar's inverted bowl, and to sense yourself at the exact centre of the universe, directly beneath the zenith. If a plumb line were dropped from the zenith, it would, you feel sure, pierce your hat—or your head, for at such a time you remove your hat to feel the sun, as you fill your lungs deep with air. The sensation is distinctly pleasant, with distinct motor reactions of expansion. Here the sunshine seems concentrated, here is the focal point of its rays, the pivot of the bright, blue day.

I am not a landscape architect, nor even a skilled horticulturist, but in thinking over some of these moods I have tried to describe, evoked more or less directly by the lines and contours of Nature, and in reflecting how such lines are similarly employed in building construction, I have come to wonder if the natural landscape does not hold lessons for our garden makers which at present they have not always scanned. To be sure, it is pretty well recognized to-day, or so I gather from the gardens I visit, that a chaos of lines in the ground plan, whether in beds, walks, or tree

specimens, creates restlessness and is quite at variance with the peace of a long horizontal of lawn and path, or a flat, unbroken surface. But it has also seemed to me that our gardens are somewhat over-given to the horizontal, that they are too often ironed out into a peaceful, flat enclosure and little effort is made to catch from Nature some of her loveliest landscape moods and overtones.

The Lombardy poplar, for instance, is a columnar tree, and eminently adapted to carry the eye straight up, to evoke aspiration like a spire. But to plant such trees in groups, or in rows, is to throw away this effect. That is like building a whole street of churches, each spire "killing" its neighbour. In his book, "What England Can Teach Us About Gardening," Wilhelm Miller prints a picture of "the proper use" of this tree, in Kew Gardens, by the lake shore. Here a single specimen rises out of the lower foliage, as Ruskin said a cathedral spire should rise, "dreaming over the purple crowd of humble roofs." Even in the photograph, it strikes the note of aspiration. In some of the old Italian gardens a similar note is struck with columnar evergreens—certain of our cedars or *arbor vitæ* strike it with unpremeditated stateliness on a rocky hillside. But the trees cannot be grouped, nor planted in rows. They must be set with a sparing hand, and in distinct relation to lower masses.

Again, how few gardens one ever sees which employ pines as Nature employs them, to throw a screen of

aspiring uprights against a lake or a sunny field or a sunset glow of rose and gold. Here again the spaced row is fatal, though for a different reason—the careless composition of Nature would be lost. I have in mind a pine grove at the end of a large and formal garden, set out at great expense many years ago and now perhaps thirty feet high. The trees are spaced as rigidly as line and rule could plant them, and they do not make a screen, moreover, but a solid mass. Their lower branches were never trimmed out to make smooth, aspiring uprights, and the grove is but a poor and formal imitation of a bit of uninteresting young forest, with rhododendrons growing peakedly underneath by the paths, instead of our native, hardy wood flowers. As this garden is on a hillside (but flattened out into artificial terraces), with a lovely prospect of the lower valley and the sunset over the blue hills beyond, the opportunity for some fine and imaginative use of pines was great—and it has been utterly muffed. Yet this estate cost its owner thousands upon thousands of dollars.

Not long ago I was passing the home of one of America's leading sculptors whose garden is chiefly the native hemlock forest which he permits to march down the hill upon his studio, and he was in his shirt sleeves at the foot of his lawn, superintending the construction of a ha-ha wall. He seemed chiefly concerned with the line on which the wall was to be laid,



Of all the . . . lines that mountains achieve, the most  
beautiful . . . is the dome





which he had carefully staked out, following a gentle undulation of the slope and swinging in an open arc to its upper base. Here was a man who could appreciate pure line! A year later I passed again, purposely to see the effect. The sod above now grew down and covered the top of the wall, so that from the house you were aware only of the natural undulations. But from below, or from the road, the line of the wall was visible, a sweet, gracious curve that might have been sculptured by a full-flooded river, a line that was Nature's own and subtly removed the taint of formality and tampering. Similarly, the sweep of trees and shrubbery by a lawn-side, so often now either a matter of ruled perspective or jagged, broken capes and promontories, might be planned to a sweeter curve, alike on its ground and its summit line, and new emotional values be secured. In such a border, for example, sharp-topped trees would be out of place, but a swell and dip and swell again of round-headed foliage, with some great umbrella elm as the Moosilauke of the range, would give a sky line of perpetual allure, with a hint of the mountain mystery in its green bulwark. It is a good deal to have cleared out from so many of our estates the "specimen" trees which used to dot the lawns and slopes like abandoned lunch boxes on the beach at Coney Island. But need our conscious planning stop with the opened vista? We have cleared the valley, but we can still arrange the walls.

The mood of the circle is the mood we should feel, it seems to me, when we stand by a sun-dial. That is the instinct of most people, I fancy, for dials are most often placed where the garden rings them and they are at the focus. A dial huddled up against a wall or set at the end of the enclosure never seems quite right. After all, it has no utilitarian use to-day, it is a symbol of our tribute to the sun, and it should be where the sunshine seems to concentrate, so that standing beside it we may remove our hat, fill our lungs, and feel that delicious sensation of warm expansion. In my ideal garden I would wish to glimpse from the dial a vista of the horizon to the four points of the compass, certainly to east and west, that I might be aware of the world rim and of the great inverted dome of the sky, with its blue intensity and its lazy cloud flotillas riding to the zenith directly over the crown of my head. Then, though my garden were set in lowly places, I would know for an instant the mood of the peak!

The natural landscape, of course, is seldom a matter of one line exclusively. Only at the base of a precipice or on the naked prairie is the vertical or the horizontal supreme. The earth's contours are full of broken lines, of curves and swells, which give contrast and variety, and because they are physiographically so interrelated they flow one into the other. Even the precipice meets the valley floor not with a right angle but the lovely curve of *débris*. To a certain extent

Nature looks after our gardens to achieve the same effect, even when we are neglectful, tending always, for instance, to throw out a *débris-curve* of shrubbery and grasses from a group of trees. But in the gardens I have visited (and the more elaborate they are the greater the extent of this tampering) I find a widespread tendency to iron out natural irregularities of ground, to make a flat floor wherever possible, to terrace a beautifully sloping hillside and build a wall or a rose arbour across a lovely curve. It seems to me that the loveliest garden is the better if somewhere in it there is a rise or dip, untampered with, maintaining its natural flow of line, to suggest the variety and contrast and stimulating irregularity of Nature. How otherwise shall we escape monotony of mood? I may be quite wrong in assuming that the best gardens, like the best literature, ought to seem spontaneous and natural, a bit of selected reality. But if I am right, what some of our gardeners need are fewer drag scrapers and more imagination. Wise is the man who buildeth his garden upon a hill, or near it, for it may be by some happy planning he can achieve a lovely curve of lawn or spray-crest of rock and columbine to cut the blue sky, or an inverted curve to slide into a ferny hollow, and thus know the mystery and the stimulation of the natural prospect, where peace and aspiration, quietude and wonder, dwell side by side.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### NATURE AND THE PSALMIST

HOW much of the influence of early environment, of those habituated reactions which comprise for each one of us the iron ring of his destiny, there is in even our deeper attitude toward the external world—toward what we call Nature! Not long ago I spent many weeks in the prairie country of the West, a sense of oppression constantly increasing in weight upon my spirit. Those endless, level plains! Those roads that stretched without a break to infinity! A house, a group of barns, a fruit orchard, now and then a clump of hardwoods, alone broke the endless, flat monotony of snow-covered fields—no, not fields, but infinitudes where a single furrow could put a girdle about an entire township in my home land! My soul hungered for a hill; my heart craved, with a dull longing, the sight of a naked birch tree flung aloft against the winter sky. Back through the endless plains of Illinois the train crawled, away from the setting sun. But the next daylight disclosed the gentle, rolling slopes of the Mohawk Valley, and before many hours had passed the Berkshire Hills



were all about us, like familiar things recovered. The camel-hump of Greylock to the north was sapphire-blue and beckoning. The nearer mountains wore their reddish mantles, pricked with green, above the snowy intervalles, and laid their upreared outlines stark against the sky. Shadowy ravines let into their flanks, suggestive of roaring brooks and the mystery of the wilderness. The clouds trailed purple shadow-anchors; the sun flashed from the ice on their scarred ledges. And a weight seemed suddenly lifted from my spirit. The words of the ancient Psalmist came to my lips unconsciously: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from God."

Yes, God dwells in the high places! The Pemigewasset Indians who would not climb Mount Moosilauke because the Great Spirit abode on the windswept summit, the ancient Hebrew Psalmist who dwelt in the shadow of the Syrian hills, and I, "the heir to all the ages," are alike in this primitive sense that God's dwelling place is up there where our eyes instinctively lift; for the glory and the wonder of the hills is upon us all, and we cannot believe otherwise.

Yet what of the man who never saw a hill? What of the tribesman of the plain or desert, or the Illinois farmer's boy? Where, for him, is God's dwelling? I have seen men from the prairie whom the hills oppressed, who hungered for their level roads stretching arrow-

like to the far horizon, just as I hungered for the blue heave of Greylock. I once spent several days in camp in the tumbled wilderness under Carrigain, with a man who all his life had followed the sea. The early sunsets and the late dawns, the constant sense of vast rock walls confronting the vision and cutting off half the sky, depressed him. He was homesick for the sea. God for him, I suppose, dwelt on the deep and spoke in the wail of the wind through the rigging, or roared with the voice of many waters. Does He speak to the prairie boy in the rustle of the endless miles of corn? Does He dwell in that pearly cloud which hangs forever above the far horizon? Is His dwelling this pervasive immensity of space? Somewhere He dwells for each of us, for man perishes who does not find for Him a habitation; but where it is depends, after all, on habit—on so simple a thing as the silent influence in early years of external sights and sounds. I was born near the hills and nurtured on their breast, and I am never happy long away from them. The most beautiful thing in the world to me is Mount Moosilauke; and the loveliest music ever made is the song of the hermit thrushes on the slopes of Cannon when the sunset shadows are creeping amid the hemlock aisles and far below on an upland pasture the cow-bells tinkle as the herd winds down to the valley. Were I a psalmist, from such things would my metaphors be drawn, and I would bid the world once more lift up its eyes unto the hills. But there may be psalm-

ists of the sea and prairie, of the frozen North and the languid tropics. After all, what matters is the sense of divinity that surrounds us, the enkindled spirit which strikes out from Nature the ultimate metaphor.

The Psalms are lyric poems. Whatever perversions may have resulted from the conflict between Judaistic scriptures and a superimposed Aryan mysticism, a wise world has known the Psalms all the time for what they are. The God of the psalmists may have been a tribal God, to be sure. For that matter, what nation to-day, after two thousand years of so-called Christianity, but worships a tribal God? We have of late been forced to contemplate the sorry spectacle of various nations on the eve of battle each lifting its voice in prayer to its tribal divinity, with that terrible certainty and lack of humour which characterize such narrow devotions. But the Psalms are not theology: they are lyric poetry—the expression of a single individual (of his time and his people, to be sure) in the face of life. Whether he was a single individual for all the Psalms, or a separate one for each, does not in the least matter. What the world cares about is the personal reaction of a human soul, for that, direct and certain, carries its message to all other souls, and time or place, name or nationality, are as naught.

The griefs the Psalmist sang are still our griefs, the doubts and consolations still are ours, and the world the Psalmist looked upon is still about us. The sun

rose and set in Judea, and the Psalmist chanted, "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice." Here was no "subtle observation" of meteorological conditions peculiar to the east coast of the Mediterranean; no aesthetic analysis, no scientific speculation. Here was simply the soul of a man touched by the beauty and the mystery of a natural phenomenon till poetry kindled on his lips and devotion in his heart. It is that simple attitude toward Nature which I sometimes think the world has lost in these latter days, verifying Goethe's statement that "animated inquiry into causes does great harm." "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice"—how calm and hushed the picture evoked, how peaceful and brooding, how like a benediction it falls upon the spirit! I think of my own mountain land, of a wooded knoll that rises from the valley, and I stand bareheaded in the fields while the golden floods of the sunset fill all the intervals with liquid light, an interval which is like a green chalice amid the hills. The golden flood creeps up the eastern slopes, and out of the darkening fields below the shadows follow, amethyst shadows that stray like smoke amid the birches. At last the gold burns only in the kindled west, in a gap between two mountain summits—a gateway to that Land of Wonder which lies forever around the world-rim underneath the setting sun. The trees upon the little foreground knoll are silhouetted now, black against the gold. The fields



"Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice"





are very still. Only a far-off cow-bell tinkles and a vesper sparrow sings softly to himself. The spirit, too, is very still, hushed with happy awe. "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice." The slow feet turn homeward through a world transformed, a world not of bicker and restriction and the small, strutting ego, but of imminent divinity.

Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it [the same hymn continues in a mood of adoration].

. . . Thou waterest her furrows abundantly;  
Thou settlest the ridges thereof:  
Thou makest it soft with showers;  
Thou blessest the springing thereof.  
Thou crownest the year with thy goodness;  
And thy paths drop fatness.

We may wax learned over this passage, declaring that it shows the influence of "the simple nature-religion of a long-established agricultural people," the Hittites of the land of Canaan. We may discourse on the geography and climate of Canaan, and show that in a time and region where all life depended upon the success of the crops, nothing could be more natural than this adoration. Yet all our discourse and discussion will seem futile enough on a day late in April, when we stand in familiar fields and watch the world made soft with showers. There will be a frail green upon the bosom of the earth where it is not ridged into gleaming brown furrows. In the orchard and the woods there will be a haze of emerald. A fringe of poplars or of birches by

the wall have put on their virgin veils, and suddenly they bow gracefully in the rising gust, tossing against a sky where sunshine and blue seem to be chased down from the zenith and back again from the horizon by the cloudy cohorts of the shower. The rain comes with a long, lateral swish, then straightens up to fall gently, till the fields send forth a rich earthy fragrance, the incense of the Spring. If it be the simple Nature-worship of a primitive agricultural people to feel, in this beautiful and benignant spectacle, this picture so soft and virginal and fragrant, repeated through the years and the centuries, the hand that loosed the floodgates of the shower, to view it calmly with the faith of a child untroubled by too animated an inquiry into causes, then let us be thankful that some instincts of our racial childhood still persist. Facts, facts, facts—why must we be forever going to Nature in search of facts! Let us go to Nature now and then in search of the great, simple mysteries.

And thy paths drop fatness.  
They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness:  
And the hills are girded with joy.  
The pastures are clothed with flocks;  
The valleys also are covered over with corn;  
They shout for joy, they also sing.

It is a lush midsummer day. The cattle are lying beneath a great oak in the upland pasture. Across the valley other hills go up with pastures flung like mantles

over their shoulders. The corn is in the green valley, with the winding thread of the river, and the glittering track of the railroad, the white church-spire above the village elms, and a certain roof that I call home. The dome of heaven is overhead; the sunshine is everywhere. "They shout for joy, they also sing." I am quite content to drop into a lazy bed of sweet-fern and become a Hittite for the time, a countryman of the manly Uriah, whose dignified devotion to duty, as Chamberlain has pointed out, contrasted so favourably with the "criminal levity" of King David!

In our mountain world the Lord indeed "stretcheth out the heavens like a curtain" and "maketh the clouds his chariot." It is not for us that he "layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters"; dwellers by lake or sea can best realize the force of that majestic metaphor; but he walketh upon the wings of our winds and maketh them his messengers. I know a great oak that stands alone and self-sufficient in a pasture (what is so self-sufficient as a sturdy, well-developed tree isolated in a clearing?), and when the northwest winds come charging down the valley it tosses its branches protestingly against the buffet, and the silent, rushing current becomes audible, is given a voice. It is only when the hurricane meets opposition that its voice is heard; its sweep is soundless through the upper air. Behind the great tree domes the blue sky where the clouds drive, an endless flotilla hurrying down the gale. The

picture is full of colour, of spaciousness, of "go." How far off and deep the sky appears! How melodious is the tossing, wailing rustle of the giant tree! How sweet in my ear, as I sit amid the hardhack, is the sudden little whistle as a gust sweeps down even into my lowly shelter! In such a mood I am asking no questions of Nature; I am humble before the spectacle, content to observe why the Psalmist said that the Lord maketh the clouds his chariot. My imagination is expanded; my soul goes up to ride upon the racing cumuli!

He appointed the moon for seasons:

The sun knoweth his going down.

Thou makest darkness, and it is night;

Wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth.

The young lions roar after their prey,

And seek their meat from God.

The sun ariseth, they get them away,

And lay them down in their dens.

Man goeth forth unto his work

And to his labour until the evening.

What a simple statement this is of the rotation of the hours, and yet how all-sufficient, in certain of our moods, even to this day! A mile or two back from the coast in the old Narragansett country of Rhode Island, amid the pitchpines and oaks, there is a freshwater pond of great beauty. Here on its shores until a generation ago the last of the Narragansetts had their reservation, their council-ring, and their school-house. The pond still bears the name they gave it,



Quacom-paug—"The Lake of the Great White Gull"—and their trails lead away from its shores into the surrounding swamps, overgrown now with blackberry vines or eroded deep into the sandy soil. Once I tramped in through the woods to this pond as the afternoon was failing and launched a canoe on its dark, still mirror. The sunset reddened till it glowed like a far-off conflagration between the pine boles on the western bank. The shadows of twilight stole out of the forest behind me. Creeping along shore, it seemed that night was already come, but by shooting the canoe out free of the lily pads and the reflections of the forest edge, the lake surface appeared to give up daylight still. Presently the canoe slipped around a wooded promontory—noiselessly, without even a drip from the paddle—and there, knee-deep in the dark-brown water, stood two deer, their tails startlingly white against the black wall of the forest. They were drinking, but one of them looked up, surprised, and gazed at me with his great eyes, as deer will often do before they make a move. He let me slide the canoe still closer before he turned, and, with evidently a whispered word to his companion, crashed up the bank and disappeared, the doe following obediently. A flash of white tail in the night blackness of the forest was the last thing I saw, but for a full minute I could hear, in diminuendo, the cracking of undergrowth and twigs.

I paddled slowly back to my landing, with the stars twinkling and bobbing in the water off the bow, and curled up, after a quiet, lonely supper, for the night, pleasantly aware of the soft, melancholy whistle of a screech-owl, the sounds of little creatures coming down to the lake to drink, the splash of a fish jumping for insects, and once, as I woke and turned, of a swish through the grasses, as if a fox had been prowling near the provisions.

The next morning the birds were busy at their matins, but along all the shore-line, where the green forest came down to dip its toes in the lake, not a creature was visible. There was, however, a fresh track in the mud near my canoe, as if a wizened foot had been set down there: a coon had visited the water, perhaps to drink, perhaps to wash a morsel of food. In half an hour after breakfast I came out of the woods upon the Post Road. It was too early for the day's procession of touring automobiles (whose passengers would rush past this knoll where I stood nor ever guess that the trail behind me led into the real Narragansett country, which they would never see); but in the fields men were astir. Already I could hear the hot "click, click, click" of a mowing-machine. A hay-rake rattled past on the road. Smoke was coming from the chimneys of the gray houses that looked almost like great boulders on the low, green plain between the Post Road and the yellow sand bar a mile or two away. The

sun was up, the world of men was astir and had gone forth to its labour until evening. I lifted my eyes to the yellow sand bar, while my nostrils sniffed the salt. Yonder was the sea, "great and wide"; yes, and there went the ships, trailing their long smoke-plumes far out where Block Island lay like a blue cloud on the horizon line. The Psalmist's cycle had been completed, and I walked homeward strangely at peace, the salt wind and the sunshine for my companions.

It is Winter now, and the snow has come, the deep snow which settles over our mountain world, transforming all the landscape for three or four months, altering its colour values, softening its outlines, and giving us a season which those who dwell in cities know nothing of. How expectantly we awaited the first steady storm from the northwest! The bare, frozen earth awaited it expectantly, too, each flower-root chill for its coverlid. I once heard of a little girl who exclaimed, when she saw her first snowfall, "Look, mamma! God has busted His feather-bed!" I like that exclamation. It is picturesque, and it is instinct with primitive devotion. Does it not suggest, indeed, the words of the Psalmist:

He giveth snow like wool;  
He scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes.

"He giveth snow like wool." We go out in the first storm, away from our warm house amid its spruces, and

swing rapidly into the open country, our faces upturned to feel the gentle sting of the flakes on cheek and lip. We cannot see far into the dull, whitish-gray sky; we are looking into opacity, a vast opacity which overhangs the world and drops cool wool upon our cheeks. The familiar landscape about us, too, is suddenly strange. The well-loved peaks have disappeared. Perspective is curiously marked by the quality of sharpness in upstanding objects. Close to us along the road runs a wall and a row of nude sugar-maples, dark and solid against the drift of the storm. Between the trunks we can see, perhaps, a group of corn-shocks standing in the field, and they are of fainter tone. Beyond them the hedge-row of poplars and chokecherries which marks the farther boundary is fainter still, almost as shadowy as the storm itself. Beyond that there is nothing but the white mystery. Out of the vast opacity above us the flakes fall without ceasing, and our boots have already become silent on the frozen road. In this great transformation of the visible universe we are isolated beings carrying with us as we move a narrow circle of familiar objects, yet aware always of the immensity beyond. One is never so intimate with Nature, so conscious of the pervasiveness of her phenomena, as in a snowstorm. In the little circle of visible objects, reduced to their barest essentials of mass and shade value, we are the exact centre always; and in some manner not easy to explain





“All the beasts of the forest do creep forth”





—perhaps impossible to explain to any one not accustomed to a voluntary life in the open—that gives us a curious sense of relationship with Nature, of dependence upon her, a deep, impregnable belief that in her manifestations we come closest to divinity.

When the snow has laid its winter mantle on our hills and built magic cornices along our brooks, Orion greets us from the evening sky and the Dog Star hangs like a lamp amid the spires of the firs. I return sometimes from New York—from the noise and glare and hurry of its streets, from the feverishness of its spirit, the oppression of its imprisoning cañon walls—and old Orion is like a friend awaiting me. Often I think of Martineau's words:

Silence is in truth the attribute of God; and those who seek Him from that side invariably learn that meditation is not the dream but the reality of life; not its illusion, but its truth; not its weakness, but its strength. Such act of the mind is quite needful, in order to rectify the estimates of the senses and the lower understanding, to shake off the drowsy order of perceptions, in which, with the eyes of the soul half closed, we are apt to doze away existence here. Neglecting it now, we shall wake into it hereafter, and find that we have been walking in our sleep. It is necessary even for preserving the truthfulness of our practical life.

To meditate in the night watches, to ascend through the frosty darkness the pasture slope behind the garden and from the hill to watch the slow procession of the stars across the sky—worlds which reck so little of

those valley lamps down here where our small village nestles—is to know indeed that

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
And the firmament sheweth His handiwork.

From Jupiter our earth would be but a tiny star; from Sirius it would be, no doubt, invisible. What “insect cares” are these that trouble us, in the face of such immensity? As the imagination leaps into depth beyond depth of space, layer after layer of passion and smallness seem cast off from our spirits, and in the silence of the midnight our soul taps anew the primal sources of its strength.

“Silence came before creation, and the heavens were spread without a word.” The stars and the sunshine, the grass and the trees, the snow that is sent like wool, the blessing of soft showers, all the lovely spectacle of the seasons, the dome of the hills, the curve of the searim, were man’s inheritance before he builded cities and made himself triumphant and ubiquitous. Of course, to say that God dwells only on the hills or speaks with the voice of many waters, to make of Nature-worship a denial of His habitation in the human heart, a denial of man’s urgent need for the Presence in the marketplace, would be the merest folly. But, especially perhaps in these latter days when we speak so much of a “love of Nature” and know so little what that means, when neither the scientific inquiry of the naturalist nor

the summer exodus through the countryside in automobiles is enough to give the world again the quick, poetic, instinctive sense of the divinity of rocks and trees and springing crops, we can more than ever feel the need for a return to primal wonder. God will not speak in the market till he has whispered in the still places. To invest stocks and stones with the incommunicable Name is not an act of childishness, but of the deepest wisdom, the wisdom of the heart that worships and is amazed, that re-creates in meditation the powers by which men live. In the fever of our modern life we cannot return to Nature too intimately. We have as yet, in spite of our pose, hardly begun that return. The ancient nurse awaits our humbleness.

## CHAPTER XIX

### CHRISTMAS AND THE WINTER WORLD

I LIKE the coming of Winter, nor can I easily read into it the symbols of sadness which the poets find.

Ah, minstrel, how strange is  
The carol you sing!  
Let Psyche who ranges  
The gardens of Spring  
Remember the changes  
December will bring!

Yet Psyche was of immortal stuff, and might easily have comforted herself with Shelley's reflection, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" The seasons wax and wane, each with its own peculiar charm, and the last rose of Summer is, after all, but the promise of a larger bush next year, rather than the sad reminder of man's mortality. We may be permitted some sober moments, some lingering melancholy, when we walk in the garden and see the sweet alyssum borders withered down, the Japanese anemones cut off in their perfection by the frost, the leaves of the poplars by the pool blowing across the sward or floating on the dark water. But even then we remember that the potatoes are dug and



stowed away in the cellar, and from the orchard comes the pungent fragrance of apples; and lifting our eyes to the hills, we see the banners of Autumn already flying on their wooded slopes.

The garden dies down for its winter sleep, the harvest is reaped, and the season slips into that indefinite stage between autumn glory and winter snow, when a blue haze hangs in the leafless trees, the chill winds of November blow, and there is ice on the little water pools of a morning. It is in this season, this hush of Nature before the winter storms, that Thanksgiving comes, our most characteristic and best-loved American holiday. Surely there is no melancholy in Thanksgiving, though there may be just a touch of soberness as we think back to those grim days when the Pilgrims reaped their first scanty harvest between the sea beach and the forest edge, and thanked God for the mere gift of life. The last warmth of Indian Summer has gone from the air, the last golden leaves have dropped from the maples, the smell of bonfires is no longer pungent; yet every country-bred American, I fancy, knows what I mean when I say that the Thanksgiving season has a peculiar, a unique charm.

From the Tennessee Cumberlands north to Canada leaves have fallen and lie restless on the ground, not yet shrivelled nor rotted, but crisp beneath the foot and in the morning indescribably fragrant with frost. The sky has lost its autumn clarity; there is a touch of lead

in it, a hint of gathering winter storms. Out in the bare, brown fields a few corn-shocks stand, and perhaps now and then a golden pumpkin; and already the crows and the pheasants have discovered this food supply. The deep woods are very still. The insect under-song of Summer has died in the grass, the bird songs in the trees. Only the wiry little *cheeps* of the chickadees are heard in the woods, or now and then the distant blows of a woodpecker or the startled uprush and booming flight of a partridge. The woodchucks have dug themselves in for the Winter. The squirrels have already hoarded their nuts, though occasionally you will see one sitting on a pine stump shredding a cone. Occasionally, too, you will see ahead a strange glint of light and come upon a maple tree so well protected that it has not yet lost its golden foliage. On a leaden November day it seems for all the world like a burst of sunshine down the forest aisle. Perhaps, far off, the crack of a hunter's gun will wake the echoes. There may be ice on the lip of the spring under the fern bank, and the sweet water is very cold. As you come back into the fields again, you hear the shouts of the football players, playing the annual Thanksgiving game, the last of the season. Smoke is ascending from all the chimneys, and your nostrils scent food. Could Thanksgiving come at any time but this gray, frosty November season, in this hush of Nature before the winter storms? We who were born in the country, at any rate, would not have it otherwise.

It is not long after Thanksgiving, in my mountain home, that Winter comes upon us in full force. It may have been that he sent cavalry scouts of snow before Thanksgiving—as early as November seventh they have arrived, I recall—but these have melted away before a morning's bombardment of sun. In December, however, Winter brings up his main forces, and we wake some morning to find the leaden sky milky in the northwest and a strange expectancy of chill in the air. Presently, over the battlement of our guardian mountain, comes the first puff of artillery, then the whole long ridge is hidden in the smoke, and ten minutes later the enemy is up and over, the storm has enveloped us, Winter, the conqueror, is here!

We wake the second morning into a world transformed, a world of white dazzle, with every angular line in the landscape softened into a curve by the snow, every fir tree a lovely minaret, every vista carpeted with crystal. "It is a Christmas-card world!" we say.

A Christmas-card world! How can Winter be cheerless when it reminds us of Christmas? Christmas, the wise ones tell us, is only half a Christian festival—it represents in part a pagan survival, like Easter. The thought, instead of being disconcerting to the orthodox, should be pleasant, for the continuity of man's spiritual nature is thus attested. Certainly, to us northern peoples, the spirit of Christmas and the spirit of Winter are inextricably knit. The strange

white purity of Nature under snow, the aspect of a world transformed from its rigid outlines, with its bareness and ugliness softly hidden, gives us all an immemorial thrill; the delight and the wonder never grow less. And with such a world transformed is Christmas associated. We pray for a "white Christmas." We frost our Christmas cards. We depict the Star of Bethlehem as shining over a snow-laden land. Our artists even fancy steam ascending from the nostrils of the gentle cattle in the stable. Such minor lapses from physiographical accuracy do not trouble us in the least, because for us the great, outstanding fact about Christmas is that it is the sweet, solemn, joyous festival of Winter. That for the inhabitants of the underside of our spinning ball it comes in Summer is a fact totally beyond the range of our comprehensions. I used to wonder as a child how the people of Australia could have any Christmas at all!

The origin of the Christmas tree I do not now remember. Is the tree a gift from Paganism, also? At any rate, it is another link connecting Christmas with the winter world. The unfortunate inhabitants of towns, who must needs buy their tree from the corner grocer, miss one of the season's rarest delights. In our mountain world, a couple of days before the holiday we put on our moccasins, our snow-shoes, our mittens and caps, and, armed with an axe, we set forth into the woods. The woods are quite silent now, for even





The cold, white world without, sparkling under the frosty stars





the chickadees have deserted them, coming in about our dwellings. The only sound is made by the snow falling from wind-stirred branches or melted off by the sun. We hear it falling, with tiny, soft thuds, as we go along. The forest aisles are like a frost cathedral. Low branches shake "their frosty pepper" in our faces. On the ground are many tracks, mute records of the wood creatures. Here a squirrel has run from a tree to his storehouse under a stump. There a pheasant slept last night, scratching away the snow to the bed of leaves below. Here a rabbit has gone bounding along. There a deer has passed, stopping to browse off a ground hemlock. But there is no sound of them now. The woods are still, save for the soft thuds of the tiny falling drifts from the branches—still and white, and lit by the winter sun. Presently we come upon the stand of young evergreens we are seeking, and hunting out the perfect specimen we desire, thick branched to the very ground, our axe rings out in the frosty silence and the fragrant spruce or balsam topples down. We tug it home with laughter, meeting others with similar loads, and as we draw near our dwelling, and the low afternoon sun is casting purple shadows over the snow and the eastern mountains are melting into amethyst, we smell the pungent fragrance of wood fires burning and hear on the village street the jingle of sleigh-bells.

We always have a little Christmas tree, too, for the

birds. Winter is the season when the birds need most protection, for their natural food supply is largely cut off, and our house is ringed with suet boxes and feeding tables. But just outside the dining-room window, on the very ledge, is the chief feeding place, and here are sunflower seeds and suet at all hours; and at all hours the chickadees, juncos, nuthatches, and woodpeckers may be seen feeding. The chickadees will feed from our hands, and if the window is open they will hop boldly inside, even taking food from the table while we are at dinner. They are so pretty, so friendly, such brave and cheerful little creatures, that a far less tender soul than Saint Francis would desire to share with them his Christmas joys. So we give them a Christmas tree all their own. It is a tiny fir tree, set in a pail outside the window. It is hung with bits of suet and seeds, and on the top is a little red candle, which we light before dark on Christmas Eve, because birds retire early, and the chickadees must have their celebration before bedtime!

It is the proper thing, I know, to sit around the family hearth (or the family radiator) at Christmas time and read "The Christmas Carol." But I have to make the shameless confession that I cannot read "The Christmas Carol" any more. For me, it no longer represents Christmas, nor the spirit of Christmas. You remember that old Scrooge, after his conversion, among various other remarkable performances gave

Bob Cratchit, his clerk, a playful dig in the ribs and a rise in pay. It was Dr. Crothers, I believe, who first suggested that it would have been rather embarrassing for Scrooge (and incidentally, we may add, for Dickens) if Bob, instead of showing a very proper lower-middle-class gratitude, had demanded all the back pay which Scrooge, by this act, had confessed was really his due—in other words, if he had demanded justice, not charity. The longer I live, the more I am learning the truth of a statement once made to me by the best man I have ever known, and the truest Christian, a man who literally gives half of his time and nearly half of his income to the salvation of the sinful, the homeless, the outcast. “Charity,” he said, “is the most abominable word in the English language.”

I once knew a New York woman of wealth and social position to argue against socialism on the ground that socialism strove to abolish the rich and poor alike. “And without the poor,” she said, “we can have no charity, which is at the very basis of Christianity.”

I was amazed at her words, nor have I quite recovered yet, for I have been realizing more and more that behind a vast deal of our Christmas literature lurks, in reality, this very spirit. And we have been calling this thing, which, when stripped of its gloss, its sentimentalities, its glad holiday wrappings, is so appalling, the Spirit of Christmas! After all, isn't it the spirit behind even the beloved “Carol”? I am afraid

that it is. I find it there, at any rate, and I never read the "Carol" any more.

"The meek and gentle Jesus," whose meekness and whose gentleness have been far too much insisted on, would have quite other ideas of the spirit of Christmas. If ever a flame was born into the world to incite men to a passion not for charity but for love, not for the spirit which finds satisfaction in handing down to those below, but in raising those below to full equality, not for almsgiving but for justice, that flame burst into light in the manger of Bethlehem. When shall we realize that Jesus was a radical? That He was so radical that He is even yet not understood? When shall we realize that the chant of the multitude of the heavenly host, heard of those shepherds who were abiding in their fields by night, can never be fulfilled so long as one half of the human race has so much that it finds self-satisfaction in making Christmas gifts to the other half, and the other half has so little that it knows no good-will for covetousness, and no peace for hunger? "Peace on earth, good-will to men!" Yes, that was the chant of the heavenly host, and to-day the guns are booming and the world is red with blood that the nations may have more trade, while little children toil in mills and factories, and pregnant mothers bow with work and hunger. What more than those simple shepherds have we done? They went and worshipped. We fill a basket with the leavings from our ample board, and



make a visit to the "deserving poor," feeling as good as Scrooge, and expecting that some Tiny Tim will cry, "God bless us every one."

But perhaps we are pressing the essayist's privilege of discursiveness too far in thus departing from our theme of Christmas and the winter world. Yet it is often such thoughts as these which come to me, far though I am from cities and the problems of cities, from wars and rumours of wars, wandering over snowy fields where only the varying hare has been ahead. Sometimes the problems of life are never so clearly seen as in solitude, and certainly the strength to meet them is never so well engendered as in silence and meditation. I like best to think of Christmas with all its old-fashioned flavouring of roast goose and plum pudding and Santa Claus and tinselled trees and rapturous kiddies and jingling sleigh-bells. I like to see the light and jollity within, the clear, cold, white world without, sparkling under the frosty stars. I like to glow with greeting for my neighbours, and feel well-disposed toward all the universe. I love to put the candles behind the wreaths in the windows and wait for our village choir to arrive outside, and then to hear their voices raised in the still night air, singing,

Good King Wenceslaus looked out  
On the feast of Stephen—

and

We three kings of Orient are,  
Bearing gifts, we travel afar—

and other lovely, plaintive old carols of the season, coming uncorrupted from Shakespeare's England.

Yet it isn't in any of these things that the deepest suggestion of Christmas lies. It is rather when I come from the woods on Christmas afternoon, across the snowy fields that are already stiffening up as the low sun sets till they creak under my snow-shoes, and draw near my own home when twilight is stealing down the eastern hills and hanging like a veil in my evergreens. Then I see, in the dark block of the house, two reddish gold squares of light, light that dances on the panes because the logs are snapping, the flames are wallowing up the chimney. I smell the smoke of them, a delicate fragrance on the cold winter air. Those golden window squares mean home, they mean not affluence, I am sure, nor yet poverty, but they are the result of wholesome struggle, which, I pray God, has harmed no other man. I should be less than human if I were not proud of them, if they did not make me warm with happiness, more tender toward the dear ones behind their shelter. But should I not be less than human, too, certainly less than Christian, if I did not confess that the true spirit of Christmas is the spirit which admits that some such a home is the right of every man who is born of woman, and which ardently desires each man to come into his birthright? I cannot see Christmas in any other way. I cannot approach my house behind its evergreens, coming out of the

winter world into the fragrance of its open fires and the glow of its window squares, without a pang of passionate happiness, and in the shadow a stab of remorse. The winter world is so exquisite, so white, so purged and still and beautiful! A happy home is so wonderful a thing! And yet the Babe who was born in Bethlehem has sorrow in His eyes.

“Justice,” He seems to say, “and a little of the white world for us all!”

THE END



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